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Variation in Written Learner Hong Kong English: A quantitative and qualitative description

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Abstract

Written Learner Hong Kong English (WLHKE) is a variety of Hong Kong English (HKE) which has received less attention in Sociolinguistics than Spoken HKE (SHKE) and computer-mediated communication (CMC) HKE (also known as CHKE). Therefore, some scholars (e.g. Setter et al., 2010 p.81) call for detailed investigation on WLHKE to provide this missing link in a widely used variety of English.

This thesis examines WLHKE using online data taken from an academic forum. It provides a descriptive account of the non-standard features in WLHKE and also employs a variationist analysis of plural marking. The results show that while WLHKE contains a number of distinct linguistic features, it also shares many linguistic features with SHKE and CHKE. A detailed analysis of plural marking demonstrates that a number of linguistic factors systematically condition the variation. Overall, WLHKE is much more standard than SHKE or CHKE, suggesting that asynchronous use of HKE allows for drafting of forms which more closely align with standard English.

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List of Abbreviations

CHKE	Computer-mediated Hong Kong English
CMC	Computer-mediated communication
EA	Error Analysis
HKE	Hong Kong English
MOI	Medium of Instruction
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
WLHKE	Written Learner Hong Kong English

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Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature

Printed name YUEN KWOK SUM

1 Introduction

The spread of English across the globe brings radical changes to the status of English in different parts of the world. Native usage of English is no longer confined to countries where English originally took shape (such as Britain and the United States); instead, other regions and countries have been developing their own *Englishes*. As a result of “the diverse sociocultural contexts and diverse uses of the language in culturally distinct international contexts”, World Englishes (henceforth known as WE) becomes reality (Kachru, 1990). In his Three-circle model, Kachru (1985) also finds that many countries (in Outer Circle) which have been colonized by the British Empire (in Inner Circle) have developed their varieties of English after independence. Examples of recognized varieties of new English include Indian English (see for example Kachru, 1976; Rana, 2013), Malaysian English (see for example Mahir et. al., 2007; Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012, 2013) and Singapore English (see for example Leimgruber, 2009, 2011).

Hong Kong is a colony of the British Empire and an international city where global trade flourishes, and so it is also a bilingual city where many of its citizens are able to speak Cantonese, their mother tongue, and English. This long-standing contact between Cantonese and English has resulted in a new variety known as Hong Kong English (henceforth HKE), as demonstrated in the spoken example in (1) below:

<S1>: We may make many kind of plastic plastic model.

<S2>: Mm.

<S1>: We can make the very small one and very thick one just just for the people choose.

<S2>: That means different size have different price.

<S1>: Yeah.

<S3>: Em I think we should manufacture them in China.

<S1>: Yeah yeah I think so.

<S2>: Yeah I think so.

<S1>: Cheap labour.

(extracted from Adolphs and Carter, 2013 p.93)

As can be seen from this extract, HKE has a number of distinct morphosyntactic (e.g. omission of plural marker for *many kind of plastic plastic model*) features in speech data, and these extend to written data as well, as demonstrated in the extract for a chatroom conversation in (2) below:

A: back la

B: gum 5 ge!!

A: haiar !my messenger yau problem ar

A: hailor ... fat jor ho dor la

A: now i go out to town , eat and eat all the time

B: dun eat so much!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

A: ahaha ~ but now eating is my entertainment wor

A: otherwise ihv nothing to do ar !wakakakak

A: haiwor !u had a grad din recently >

B: wooh u know dat?!

A: haiar !

(extracted from Poon, 2010 p.299)

As the extracts above show, HKE provides a wealth of linguistic data for analysis and there have been a number of studies of both spoken (e.g. Budge, 1989; Chan and Li, 2000; Deterding et al., 2008; Gisborne, 2000; Hung, 2000; Stibbard, 2004; Zhang, 2009, 2010) and computer-mediated communication (henceforth CMC) (e.g. Bolton, 2002; Cheng, 2002; Lin, 2008; Poon, 2005; 2010; Tam, 2007). However, a third, very predominant use of HKE is in the formal academic writing of students who are learning English as a second language. An example of this variety of HKE, which I name written learner Hong Kong English (WLHKE), is shown as in (3) below.

Tomorrow is my schoolday, now I feel that very tension, because
I long time no see my favorites teacher, she is very good person.
Tomorrow first to my teacher say good morning and together eat
lunch. But I meaning is go to school do interview of President and
student by school life.

(extracted from A114 in Appendix 1.1)

Despite the widespread use of ‘English’ in more formal settings, to date these data have not been the subject of linguistic analysis (e.g. Setter et al., 2010). However, previous analyses have demonstrated that written forms of language are very different from spoken forms (Crystal, 2005; Schallert, Kleiman & Rubin, 1977). Moreover, CMC may be situated in between written and spoken forms (Indrova, 2011). This gives rise to a key question for the current research:

How similar is WLHKE to other kinds of HKE, namely CHKE and SHKE?

In this thesis, I tackle this question through an analysis of WLHKE, providing both a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the non-standard morphosyntactic forms found in these data. I will compare and contrast the non-standard forms found in WLHKE, CHKE and SHKE, so as to establish what is the same, what is different and why.

Following this introduction is Section 2, which provides a literature review. Section 3 provides a description of the data which I will analyse. Section 4 provides a qualitative analysis which features a descriptive overview of the grammatical features of this variety of Hong Kong English, and Section 5 a quantitative analysis of a commonly occurring form in WLHKE – omission of plural marking. Sections 6 and 7 discuss and summarize the results in the context of the development of a largely ignored phenomenon - WLHKE.

2. Languages in Hong Kong

2.1 General Information on English and Chinese in Hong Kong

Hong Kong had been a British colony since 1841, and it was not handed over to China until 1997. English became the official language of Hong Kong after colonization, and it was also the earliest language by which the colonial government of Hong Kong communicated with the general public, despite the fact that Chinese people made up most of the city's population (Luke and Richards, 1982). Chinese was given official status in Hong Kong in 1974, but English still maintains its high status and functions these days, as will be discussed in detail in Section 2.2.

Chinese in Hong Kong can be divided into some subgroups, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Hakka, and so forth. These dialects serve as the mother tongues of most Hong Kong Chinese; Cantonese is the mother tongue of most Hong Kong Chinese, and it is being used between most Hong Kong Chinese in daily life. According to the population census, 92% of the total population in Hong Kong is Chinese (Hong Kong Government, 2011), with Cantonese being the mother tongue of 90% of all Hong Kong Chinese. English remains the mother tongue of a minority of Hong Kong's population; only 3.5%. Therefore, Cantonese obviously serves as the lingua franca between many Hong Kong Chinese.

2.2 Linguistic Phenomena of English in Hong Kong

This section covers several linguistic phenomena of English in Hong Kong,

including language contact between Chinese and English (2.2.1), high functions of English (2.2.2) and linguistic prescription of English (2.2.3).

2.2.1 Language Contact in Hong Kong

The establishment of English as an official language in Hong Kong dates back to the beginning of Britain's colonization of Hong Kong. The spread and development of English in Hong Kong can be demonstrated by Schneider's (2003) model.

Schneider's (2003) model has five steps. In *foundation*, the first step, English is introduced into a country, mainly through colonization, and has little contact with the local language due to a lack of cross-cultural communication. *Exonormative stabilisation* is the second step, in which English is spoken and taught in the country, so that a small number of local people can learn English and join the elite class. Use of English at this stage adheres to the norms of standard British and/or American English, and the local variety becomes stigmatised. In *nativization*, the third step, the local variety is considered "improper" English by some local people, whereas others may identify themselves with this variety. *Endonormative stabilisation*, which is the fourth step, often occurs in tandem with the country's political independence. The local norms are now recognized and accepted; the local variety can be found in creative literature and it becomes codified for formal use. In *differentiation*, the final step, the local variety undergoes internal diversification, which means that the variety has formed its own branches of regional and/or social dialects. These new dialects represent new identities in different regions, as well as social status within the country.

In the case of Hong Kong, Schneider believes that it sits somewhere between the second and third steps because it is still heavily dependent on the norms of Standard English, but a nativized variety of English can also be observed. Most citizens of Hong Kong, as mentioned above, still do not identify themselves with HKE, towards which they hold negative attitudes.

2.2.2 High Functions of English

As mentioned, Cantonese is the mother tongue of 9 out of 10 Hong Kong Chinese, therefore it is understandably the lingua franca between many of these speakers. English, on the other hand, whilst seldom used in the daily life of many Hong Kong Chinese, it maintains its high status in Hong Kong.

Both English and Chinese are given equal significance in Hong Kong's education system. English and Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese or both) are compulsory language subjects in all primary and secondary schools, meaning that many children learn the two languages from the age of 6 up until 17 or 18. The Medium of Instruction (MOI) of all universities is English, unless the course specifically requires another language or languages. As for the public examinations in Hong Kong, candidates are required to take and pass both language subjects if they want to enter any local university. To pass English examinations, students are also expected to learn only standard British and American English (Setter et al., 2010 p.104-105). Therefore, nowadays, students in Hong Kong generally spend over ten years learning both languages and drilling for the language examinations.

In the government sector, all executive, judicial and legislative branches used only English during the colonial period. Similarly, English was the only language used in the legal sector at that time. Chinese was later given official status in 1974,

and interpretation was first available in courtrooms in the 1980s. From then on, both Chinese and English were the languages used in the documents in these two fields. Despite the handover in 1997, English continues to play an important role within the Hong Kong Government and the legal sectors as, still today, most of the proceedings in law courts are conducted in English (Dickson & Cumming, 1996; Setter et al., 2010 p.104).

In sum, English remains an important language for many people in Hong Kong, even though it serves almost exclusively high functions. English plays an important role in Hong Kong's education system. In government and legal sectors, English has long been the primary language used in speech and in written texts. For ordinary people, English plays an important role in their studies and work. Simultaneously, however, Hong Kong people seldom use English in their daily intra-ethnic communication. English is therefore a language confined to high functions in Hong Kong.

2.2.3 Linguistic Prescription of English

Considered a 'high' language in Hong Kong, Standard English alone is expected from those who are educated. Hong Kong English (i.e. the nativized variety of English in Hong Kong) is generally considered an improper use of English, which often gets corrected (Groves, 2009). Therefore, Hong Kong people rely, in general, on an exonormative norm in learning, teaching and using English, and their persistence constitutes linguistic prescription, turning it into a prevalent linguistic phenomenon in Hong Kong.

Although few studies on linguistic prescription in Hong Kong have been conducted, some scholars have discovered that Hong Kong people are more strongly

attached to standard British and/or American English than other varieties of English, and that they are resistant to the features of Hong Kong English. These prevalent attitudes among Hong Kong people reflect the phenomenon of linguistic prescription in Hong Kong.

Bolton and Lim (2000) mention a continuing fierce debate over the “falling standards” of English among Hong Kong people. According to Bolton and Lim, this issue started from mid-1980s and remains up to now. Opinions supporting the phenomenon of linguistic deterioration can be found in newspapers, notably *South China Morning Post*, the only English newspaper in Hong Kong. The supporters of this argument also claim that only by maintaining high proficiency of English can Hong Kong people remain competitive in world trade, which requires international contact. This long debate over the low standard of English reveals how the general public in Hong Kong are anxious to maintain a high level of English proficiency. They are motivated to do so because of English’s functions in the workplace, as well as its global importance.

Other studies also show that the nativized variety of English is often negatively viewed. Zhang (2009, 2010) discovered that Hong Kong people hold negative attitudes towards Hong Kong accents. Her study shows that Hong Kong people rate Hong Kong accents even lower than the accents found in other Asian countries, like Philippine English¹. Such results, demonstrating that Hong Kong English is negatively viewed by its own speakers, may support the presence of linguistic prescription in English phonology in Hong Kong society.

Another study by Fung (2003) reports that Hong Kong English teachers,

¹Note that Filipino domestic maids enjoy lower social status in Hong Kong

especially those who are non-native speakers, hold negative attitudes towards Hong Kong English. It is reported that they regard Hong Kong English as “deviation and a non-standard form” (Fung, 2003).

The reasons behind the prevalence of linguistic prescription have been discussed by some scholars, such as Setter et al. (2010 p.110), who state that “socio-political changes in the education system” raise society’s average expectation of Hong Kong students’ standard of English. MOI is generally believed to be an educational factor resulting in the prevalence of linguistic prescription. For many subjects, teachers teach in English, which creates an all-English learning environment for students. Highly competitive public examinations may also play a role in the prevalence of linguistic prescription, because in order to pass an English examination, or even to achieve a high grade in this subject, Hong Kong students are required to excel at Standard English². Pragmatic purposes like work and the needs of intercultural communication also motivate Hong Kong people to learn “good” and “correct” English. It is possible that English’s roles in high functions of society give this language high social prestige. Apart from being instrumental, English is also considered a language used by the elite class and successful people. Hong Kong people, probably, are thus motivated to learn Standard English, but not locally nativized English.

In sum, linguistic prescription is a prominent and persistent phenomenon which governs many Hong Kong people’s usage of English. Hong Kong people hold positive attitudes towards Standard English, and so these two varieties are encouraged. On the other hand, Hong Kong English is considered erroneous, and so Hong Kong’s

² Despite the differences between British and American Standard English, they have much in common in terms of morphosyntax. Therefore, in the current thesis, I will refer to Standard English as a general variety of English.

general public tend to, or wish to, avoid using it. Therefore, Hong Kong people's desires to use British and American English and to avoid Hong Kong English give rise to the phenomenon of linguistic prescription.

2.3 Languages, Attitudes and Identity

A speaker's positive attitude towards their own speech is one of the most important factors in how speakers identify themselves with their languages. If they have a positive attitude, they will maintain and even further develop their languages (see for example the cases of Catalan, Basque and Galician, in Price, 2010). In this section, I will discuss how Hong Kong people identify themselves with different languages and dialects.

2.3.1 Cantonese and Mandarin

Cantonese, as the mother tongue of most Hong Kong Chinese, is "perceived as a marker of group and ethnic solidarities" (Gibbons, 1987). In other words, Cantonese is the language which is the most closely associated with Hong Kong people's identity, mainly because of its practical usage in Hong Kong people's daily life. Hyland (1997) confirms this finding by stating that Hong Kong people strongly identify themselves with Cantonese culture. Lee (2005) believes that Cantonese will remain an important language to many Hong Kong Chinese in both formal and informal domains. Lee and Leung (2012) also find that Cantonese is the most frequently used language in the workplace, though in the educational sector, the Hong Kong government tends to think that Cantonese teaching is less important than English and Mandarin.

Mandarin remains spoken as a mother tongue by around 1% of the total Hong Kong population. This has been the case for the last two decades, but Mandarin is thought by some Hong Kong people, especially the government officials in the education sector, to be important in both the workplace and education since the Handover. According to Lee and Leung (2012), some educators believe that Hong Kong education policy should pour more resources on Mandarin teaching than Cantonese, because the former is the official language of China; the Hong Kong government spends most of its funding on English and Mandarin. Lee (2005) reports Hong Kong students' integrative feelings towards Mandarin. For example, more than half of the interviewees feel that they are Chinese when using Mandarin. It remains uncertain, however, whether these feelings arise from cultural affiliation or pragmatic purposes.

In short, Cantonese, as the mother tongue of most Hong Kong Chinese, serves as the *lingua franca* and an identity marker within the Chinese community in Hong Kong, whilst the usage of Mandarin is limited to pragmatic purposes despite its rising importance in education.

2.3.2 Standard English and Hong Kong English

The relationship between English and Hong Kong people's construction of linguistic identity has been examined by several scholars, though each yields different results. Some studies find that English helps Hong Kong people mark their identities as members of Hong Kong. According to the studies by Lai (2001) and Chan (2002), Hong Kong people view English as a part of life.

However, Gibbons (1987) has found that Hong Kong people exhibit “strong sanction against using English for intra-ethnic communication”, which implies that English, despite the fact that it has become part of Hong Kong people’s lives, plays a role mainly in high functions. It cannot replace Cantonese, the mother tongue of most Hong Kong Chinese people.

Other scholars, such as Johnson (1994), Hyland (1997) and Pennington and Yue (1994) argue that the importance of English remains at instrumental level. Many Hong Kong people learn English only because they think that this language can help them achieve financial gains and communicate with foreigners. They also find that socially, English is not used for intra-ethnic communication, because Hong Kong Chinese prefer speaking with one another in Cantonese. English, however, helps the Hong Kong Chinese constitute an international identity. Moreover, even though Hong Kong people no longer see British culture as a threat, they are not particularly keen to learn more about foreign culture through learning English, and so English does not play a strong cultural role in Hong Kong. More recent studies by Kwok (2004) and Lee (2005) confirm most parts of the above phenomena, but Lee believes that the younger generations in Hong Kong are more likely to embrace Western culture, and thus become motivated to communicate with foreigners in English. This indicates that, in future, English may start to play a stronger cultural role in Hong Kong.

In her study on Hong Kong people’s attitudes towards Hong Kong accents, Zhang (2010) asked her participants to explain how they perceive HKE. The concepts of this term vary slightly among Hong Kong people, but in general some common ideas can be found. While some participants mention a few spoken and written linguistic features, many attach negative labels to HKE, such as “non-standard”, “ungrammatical”, “incorrect”, “not fluent” etc. Zhang also stresses that not a single

positive label can be found at all, indicating that Hong Kong people do not accept this variety.

In short, Standard English may have become a part of life for many Hong Kong people mainly because of pragmatic reasons; English did not seem to play important cultural and social roles until recently, and new generations in Hong Kong tend to be more familiar with Western culture than past generations. However, in general, regardless of age, Standard English is still being embraced and learned in Hong Kong, whereas the locally nativized variety of English is discouraged and mostly viewed negatively.

2.4 Debate on Hong Kong English

The idea of HKE being a variety of New English is a relatively recent concept among scholars. Before the introduction of the argument that HKE exists, scholars and the general public in Hong Kong tended to label “English in Hong Kong style” as “bad English”, errors etc. Therefore, past research on Hong Kong people’s formal English writing, unsurprisingly, adopted an Error Analysis approach, and details of the findings of these previous studies will be covered in Section 2.4.1.4 below.

As more and more nativized Englishes from across the world are being recognized, investigations on HKE are also carried out, but yielding different results. As will be discussed in Section 2.4.2.1, different scholars attempt to argue for or against the presence of HKE in different approaches and with different models.

2.4.1 Error Analysis: Hong Kong English as Interlanguage

The following sections will briefly discuss the theories of Error Analysis, the definitions of several related concepts, criticisms directed at the theories, and their application to HKE.

2.4.1.1 Theories of Error Analysis (EA)

Some scholars (e.g. Richards, 1971; Gorbet, 1979; Sharma, 1980) adopt EA, in which these scholars identify errors produced by learners in their spoken and written texts, before then searching for the causes of these errors.

Basically, learners may transfer linguistic rules of their mother tongues to target languages, but when the linguistic rules of the two languages do not match, errors arise (more details in Section 2.4.1.2). According to Richards (1971), learners may also (1) apply a linguistic rule to inappropriate form of target language, largely because of the learners' prior experiences of learning other forms of target language; (2) apply a linguistic rule to areas where the rule is not allowed according to the standard rule of target language, not because of previous learning experience, but because of not knowing the rule; (3) fail to apply a rule in a complete manner; (4) create a linguistic rule which does not exist in the target language.

Scholars in EA hold the belief that since learners produce errors for different reasons, it is possible that they in fact create their own sets of linguistic rules during the learning process (Khansir, 2012). Different learners, despite coming from the same social and cultural backgrounds, may have different sets of rules as they may be exposed to different language data when learning the target languages.

2.4.1.2 Related Concepts: First Language Interference and Interlanguage

Two important concepts, namely *first language interference* and *interlanguage*, are often mentioned in EA.

First Language Interference

The transfer of linguistic rules from first language to the target language during the learning process is coined *first language interference*. Learners resort to using L1 forms for producing target language when they do not have sufficient L2 support (Krashen, 1981 p.67). They also cultivate their own habit of language use based on their mother tongue, and so it is common for the learner to transfer his or her linguistic habit to the target language (Saville-Troike, 2006 p.35). In sum, errors arising from first language interference should reflect the structure of a learner's mother tongue.

Interlanguage

Interlanguage is considered a learner's knowledge of a target language which is "independent of both learner's first language and target language" (Ellis, 1985). Since interlanguage is the learner's production throughout the learning process, it has an intermediate status between the learner's first language and the target language. Therefore, interlanguage is also considered a result of a learner's inefficient learning. In the long term, a learner is expected to make progress and strive to avoid errors, so

that he or she is capable of using the target language to a near-native or native level, and at this stage, interlanguage is expected to be dropped.

2.4.1.3 Criticisms of Error Analysis

Failure to produce a comprehensive picture of how students write in English is the major drawback of EA. The focus of EA on error production draws criticism for not looking at the complete picture of how learners of second languages produce their target languages. Lennon (2008) points out that learners do not simply produce errors, but also correct/standard forms. It is therefore equally important for scholars to examine how the learners write standard and non-standard forms to obtain a more accurate description of learners' production.

Section 2.4.3.2 will provide more information on how a variationist paradigm can complement EA.

2.4.1.4 Error Analysis in Hong Kong's English Learning

EA is a popular approach among scholars who investigate errors produced by Hong Kong students in their written and spoken texts (see for example Chu, 1987; Chu, 2005; Fong, 1987; Hou, 1983; Hui, 2005; Kwan, 1997; Paskewitz, 1999 for written errors; see Paskewitz, 1999 and Wong, 1985 for spoken errors). A number of scholars also concentrate on specific errors, or Hong Kong students' difficulty in acquiring specific grammatical rules, such as connectives (Leung, 1993), determiners (Lau, 2005), plural marking (Budge, 1989; Law, 2012), morphological acquisition

skills (Ho, 2010), negation (Wong, 2005), lexical errors (Jim, 2005), passive voice (So, 2005), prepositional placement (Chan, 2003), relative clauses (Chan, 2005; Cheung, 2002), subject-verb agreement (Beer, 2010; Law, 2005), verb-related errors (Chan, 1987), vocabulary acquisition (Harfitt, 1999; Lee, 1995), acquisition of WH-questions (Wat, 2006) and so forth.

Scholars also attempt to explain how errors arise in HKE. By comparing the errors produced by students and Chinese grammatical rules, some scholars believe that first language interference occurs in lexical (Chu, 1987; Chan, 1987; Chu, 2005), morphological (Kwan, 1997), morphosyntactic (Kwan, 1997); phonological (Budge, 1989), semantic (Chan, 1987), and syntactic (Beer, 2010; Chan, 1987; Chan, 2003; Chu, 1987) levels. Apart from the interference of learners' mother tongue, overgeneralization is also found in lexical (Chu, 1987; Hui, 2005; Kwan, 1997), morphological (Chu, 1987; Kwan, 1997), morphosyntactic (Kwan, 1997) and syntactic (Chan, 1987; Chu, 1987; Hui, 2005; Kwan, 1997) levels.

Nonetheless, the overall picture of the previous studies of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in Hong Kong is that the students produce a large number of errors in different levels, but we do not know exactly how and how often students produce both standard and non-standard forms.

Chu's (2005) research is one of the typical examples of how EA is carried out. The researcher looks for errors in the subjects' writing. The errors are then counted and listed in the report. Below are two figures showing how the errors are listed. Note that production of standard forms is not considered in Chu's research.

Table 1 – Errors related to verb structure

Error type	Frequency
Tense and aspect	51
Gerund	38
To+infinitive	10
Bare infinitive	4
Participle	8
Verb transitivity	19
Verb conjugation	11
Missing verb or incomplete verb structure	15
Erroneous verb or verb structure	8
Use of the subjunctive mood	2
Pseudo-passive construction	6
Ergative construction	3

Figure 2.1: List of Errors Related to Verb Structure in Previous Research

(extracted from Chu, 2005 p.26)

Table 2 – Errors related to single words

Error type	Frequency
Article	75
Quantifier	11
Preposition and prepositional phrase	37
Part of speech	27
Pronoun case	8
Singular/plural and countable/uncountable usage	35
Spelling	43

Figure 2.2: List of Errors Related to Single Word in Previous Research

(extracted from Chu, 2005 p.40)

As can be seen from the figures above, errors are counted and categorized into different groups. It reflects that previous research in this area tends to be qualitative in nature, as researchers strive to find out what errors are produced and which ones are frequently found. In this kind of research, we do not have sufficient information on the production of standard forms. For example, while we may learn from previous

research that many Hong Kong students produce non-standard articles, we are oblivious to how often they produce standard articles. Therefore, quantitative research which takes both standard and non-standard forms into consideration is required, so that we can understand how and how frequently Hong Kong students produce various forms. In short, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of WLHKE, the qualitative approach, which is often adopted in EA, can be supplemented with a quantitative approach.

2.4.1.5 Summary

The above sections show that Error Analysis can identify and explain errors in learners' production. However, EA has limitations, as they mainly compare the standard and non-standard forms, as is the case for HKE. In order to gain better understanding of HKE, we need to look into the linguistic system of HKE, which takes us to the field of World Englishes.

2.4.2 World Englishes Approach: Hong Kong English as New English

World Englishes was first advocated by Kachru (1985), who challenges the traditional notion of Standard Englishes (e.g. Standard British and/or American English) being the only acceptable forms in terms of both communication and education. He argues that when English spreads across the globe, different groups of people will slowly develop their own rules for this language, leading to the establishment of different varieties of English, such as Indian English (Kachru, 1976;

Rana, 2013), Malaysian English (Mahir et. al., 2007; Thirusanku and Yunus, 2012, 2013) and Singapore English (Leimgruber, 2009, 2011). Moreover, a large number of people in these areas learn English for reasons such as pursuing education and conducting business, and scholars have found that these people speak and write English with certain nativised features. Examples include Euro-English (Forche, 2012; McArthur, 2002; Mollin, 2006) and Russian English/ Englishes (Davydova, 2012; Proshina, 2005, 2014).

However, in some cases, a group of learners from a certain geographical area may make similar or even identical mistakes, leading to the controversial issue over the status of a certain form of English, as is reported in the case of Philippine English (Gonzalez, 1983), the features of which can be described either as a new variety of English or simply as errors. Similarly, in the context of HKE, this variety has long been labelled erroneous by scholars of EA, and it also attracts attention from scholars advocating the concept of World Englishes. In the following sections, I will briefly introduce the controversy of HKE's status (2.4.2.1), as well as the recent research which divides HKE into different varieties (2.4.2.2).

In short, Kachru rejects the long-held belief that native speakers of English own the language. Instead, English belongs to every person who uses it, thus giving rise to different varieties of English. Therefore, *Englishes* may also appear to be the more appropriate word when we state that English is the global language nowadays. However, simultaneously, some varieties of New English are also regarded as erroneous, as is the case with HKE. The following sections will further discuss the controversial topic of HKE.

2.4.2.1 Controversy of Hong Kong English

Unlike other former British colonies, such as Singapore and Filipino, Hong Kong has not yet had a universally recognized local variety of English, even though the presence of HKE has long been a subject of debate. While the earliest scholars argue against the presence of HKE, defining it as a collection of errors, some consider HKE an emerging variety. For scholars who agree that HKE is a rising variety, however, agreement has not yet been reached. As a matter of fact, the definition of HKE also differs among these scholars. To date, various studies (e.g. Bolton, 2002; Mong, 2013) define HKE in different ways.

A number of scholars (see Groves, 2009, 2010; Poon, 2005, 2010 for example) argue that linguistic features of HKE alone cannot form the sole criterion; equally important are the attitudes of the users of HKE. Poon's studies demonstrate that while CHKE consists of its own distinctive features, Hong Kong people also hold positive attitudes towards CHKE, which is therefore, as Poon argues, an emerging variety of HKE.

Nonetheless, it is agreed that linguistic aspect is generally the first step of defining HKE. Section 2.4.2.2 will briefly discuss previous studies of the linguistic features of HKE.

2.4.2.2 Varieties of Hong Kong English

Abundant previous studies have identified a large number of distinctive features of both spoken and written HKE. It is found that HKE is no longer a single variety of New English; instead, many different types of HKE exist. This section will briefly

cover the research findings on the linguistic features of three identified varieties of HKE, namely (1) SHKE; (2) CHKE; (3) WLHKE.

SHKE

A number of studies exploring Hong Kong people's English usage report a large number of distinctive linguistic features, suggesting the possible presence of a localized variety of English in Hong Kong. The most thoroughly researched area is perhaps phonology of HKE. Chan and Li (2000), Hung (2000), Stibbard (2004), Deterding et al. (2008) study Hong Kong people's pronunciation of English with different methods, such as reading out listed words, speaking in interviews, recording speeches in classrooms and so forth. All of these studies point to the conclusion that distinctive linguistic features of SHKE exist. For example, substitution of consonants and vowels is reported in various studies (Bolton and Kwok, 1990; Hung, 2000; Luke & Richards, 1982; Stibbard, 2004); final consonants are also found to be deleted or simplified (Hung, 2000; Luke & Richards, 1982).

SHKE is likely to be a continuum in which speakers pronounce the same phonemes differently. Stibbard (2004) argues that pronunciation among Hong Kong speakers displays "instability", and he believes it may reflect the fact that Hong Kong speakers do not have a systematic pronunciation pattern, or it is because of the different methods of data collection and analyses among different researchers. For example, in Hung's (2000) study, subjects are told to read from word lists; Chan and Li (2000) observe their subjects in classrooms; Luke & Richards (1982) and Bolton & Kwok (1990) collect data from connected speeches. In fact, it is possible that variation instead of instability contributes to Hong Kong speakers' different

pronunciations in different types of speech acts and/or styles.

Apart from the phonological features of SHKE, several morphological and syntactic features have also been studied.

One morphological feature investigated is plural marking. When Budge (1989) investigated insertion and omission of plurality of count nouns in Hong Kong people's speeches, she found that pre-modification which indicates plurality is more likely to be followed by standard count nouns with standard plural marking. This is probably because such pre-modification reminds students of the necessity of attaching a plural marker. Her study is later followed up and supported by Setter et al. (2010 p.46). Given the relatively small sample size in Budge's study, however, it remains unclear how frequently Hong Kong people use standard and non-standard forms when they speak English; the factors resulting in these features are not known either. Moreover, the question of whether all of the syntactic features of SHKE are also shared by written forms of HKE remains unanswered.

CHKE

English usage in computer-mediated communication (CMC), such as in online forums and chatrooms, has given rise to a series of distinctive varieties of CMC English, which are also named "Netspeak" by Crystal (2001). General descriptions of e-grammar, the grammar of English in CMC, have been the focus of several studies (Herring, 2012; Danet and Herring, 2007). Non-standard features of English usage in CMC cover the following aspects:

1. Typography: the use of non-alphabetic symbols (e.g. \$, * etc.), nonstandard

capitalization (e.g. lack of capitalization for the first letter of the first word in a sentence), emoticons (e.g. :-D means that the user is laughing and/or amused) etc.

2. Orthography: the use of loosened forms of spellings (e.g. *slp* instead of sleep), letter substitutions (e.g. *z* replacing *s*), and so forth.
3. Morphology: the word formation processes which include clipping (e.g. *nick* being derived from *nickname*), blending (e.g. *netizen*, being derived from *network citizen*), acronyms (e.g. *Idk* from *I don't know*), and so forth.
4. Syntax: the use of fragmented sentences, conversion of parts of speech (e.g. *text* becomes a verb) and so forth.

Non-standard features can help build rapport between people who are communicating with one another on online platforms. According to Herring (2012), users may try to produce speech-like utterances. Some users also make use of non-standard features in order to communicate in a non-standard language variety (for example the Hong Kong Chinese). Moreover, online conversations are spontaneous or near-spontaneous. Therefore, fragmented sentences, clipping, blending, spelling mistakes and loosened forms of spellings are common.

Around the world, the rising popularity of chatgroups on the Internet gives rise to the emergence of hybrid languages among bilingual users who know English. Examples of such hybrid languages include Greeklish (Tseliga, 2007) and online Egyptian Arabic (Palfreyman & Al-Khalil, 2003), which are combinations of English and other languages being Romanized.

In the context of Hong Kong, some of the most recent research on HKE (Bolton, 2002; Cheng, 2002; Lin, 2008; Poon, 2005; 2010; Tam, 2007) also shifts the focus to the language use in CMC. The widespread usage of synchronous chatgroups

provides a platform where Chinese and English come into contact when Hong Kong users try to convey their messages.

Bolton (2002) reports that the following features in CHKE: lack of capitalisation at the beginning of sentences, omission of sentential subject, and shortening (i.e. *u r* replacing *you are*; *gf* for *girlfriend*).

Hong Kong's Cyber English also contains Romanized Chinese characters which convey messages expressing Cantonese words and phrases, such as *moliu* (i.e. bored or boring) (Poon, 2010), *ho* (i.e. good) (Cheng, 2002), and so forth. Other strategies include literal translations of Cantonese to English (e.g. *eye corner high*, meaning *being very demanding*; Poon, 2010) and end-of-sentence particles in Romanised form, such as *la*, and *lor* (Cheng, 2002; Poon, 2010).

Poon (2010) also summarises a list of morphological and syntactic features of CHKE:

1. Lack of distinction between count and mass noun phrase

Example: aiya....last yEAR had so few function and not all of the take photos..

(extracted from Lin, 2008)

2. Localised vocabulary

Example: wa..gummei ho leng law

Note that the word *wa* is an exclamation equivalent to *wow* in English; *gum mei ho leng law* is the question *Then it'd be beautiful*.

(extracted Poon, 2010)

3. Ambiguity in verb marking

Example: I can't help laughing when I received that!

(extracted from Poon, 2010)

4. Distinctive structures of relative clauses

Example: i don't know bor... something looks nice lor...³

(extracted from Poon, 2010)

5. Differences in the use of prepositions

Example: for nancy, victor, felix and man chai lo!!!!!! Total 4 ppl!!!
when u done w/ exam?? i think each of us pay about 30 – 40 to the
whiole thing la... how's that?

(extracted from Poon, 2010)

6. Differences in the use of articles

Example: Here is Ø UK la. Cannot compare with civilized town.

(extracted from Poon, 2010)

From the above examples, it can be seen that CHKE deviates from Standard English at the morphological, syntactic and lexical levels.

³ Note that the relative pronoun *which* or *that* is omitted in the sentence.

Written Learner Hong Kong English

Much fewer studies investigate written HKE from a socio-linguistic perspective, treating it as an emerging variety instead of mistakes and/or errors. For example, Benson (2002) believes that distinctive Hong Kong lexicons exist. Gisborne (2000) has also studied how Hong Kong people produce relative clauses. In general, outside the EA framework, the overall picture of written HKE is still incomplete. Setter et al., (2010 p.80-90) also admit that little such research is available. Therefore, more investigation in this area is required.

Insights into Hong Kong English

Although HKE can be defined broadly as a localized variety of English used by Hong Kong people, an in-depth investigation reveals that there exist differences between *Englishes* used by Hong Kong people in different domains. For example, it can be argued that at least three varieties of HKE exist in the contexts of speaking, of formal academic writing, and of CMC. Moreover, HKE in formal writing is largely analysed within EA, which is outside the field of study for scholars of World Englishes.

Therefore, HKE cannot be understood as merely a variety which consists of one set of linguistic features and which is used in all domains. HKE, instead, is a collection of different varieties which Hong Kong people select according to the domains.

When it comes to identifying HKE as a collection of different varieties, a continuum, based on how much a variety's linguistic features resemble those of

Standard English, may be drawn for the three identified varieties of HKE as shown below. Note that it is a hypothesized continuum, as will be explained below.



Figure 2.3: Continuum of Hong Kong English

In the continuum in Figure 2.1, Written HKE and SHKE are placed on the two opposite ends because Written HKE is expected to be more conservative, therefore tending to be more similar to Standard English than SHKE. CHKE may fall between Spoken and Written HKE because CHKE itself displays characteristics of Spoken and Written HKE; on the one hand, CHKE is typed/ written, and on the other hand, it is synchronous in nature, as speakers can engage in an ongoing conversation in real time, just as they do in face-to-face conversations (Poon, 2010).

However, despite the presence of previous studies on Written HKE (as mentioned in Section 2.4.1.4), insufficient details of how students produce the standard and non-standard forms are available, and so comparison between linguistic features of the three varieties is lacking. Therefore, the above continuum is only an assumption.

2.4.3 Variationist Perspective for SLA and New Englishes

Variation is an important concept in sociolinguistics (2.4.4.1), and it is also becoming prevalent in academic studies in the field of SLA (2.4.4.2). Several

important previous studies will also be covered, as they offer us insights into the potential direction of my current study. This direction may also provide contributions to the future academic development of Hong Kong's learner English and/or HKE.

2.4.3.1 Variationist Sociolinguistics

“Everyone knows that language is variable,” thus said Sapir (1921 p.147). However, traditionally, linguistics tends to investigate languages in their standardized forms, which are usually relatively stable and fixed, showing little or no variation. Variation within, or between, languages, on the other hand, received little attention until the late 1960s and the early 1970s (Bayley, 2005). Therefore, linguistics traditionally put emphasis on the standardized and fixed forms, which usually appear in written texts; spoken texts, which are naturalistic and show more variation, are not well studied.

Many linguistic scholars now turn their attention to naturalistic speech, and especially the vernacular. Variation theory, pioneered by Labov (see 1963, 1966, 1969 for example), aims at investigating the varying structures of a language. One principal idea in variation theory is that production of variables is not random; in fact, it is structured. Such variation is also known as orderly heterogeneity (Tagliamonte, 2006 p.6). Sociolinguistic scholars stress that systematicity can be found in speakers' speech, and so they look for linguistic and socioeconomic factors giving rise to these patterns which arise.

The variationist paradigm adopts quantification as a method to measure what variables are found, how linguistic variables are realized, how frequently they are

employed, and in what environments they are used etc. In quantitative analysis, variants are identified, collected and counted. Afterwards, scholars adopting variation paradigm seek possible reasons which can explain the co-existence of the variables.

According to Tagliamonte (2006 p.5), the variationist paradigm sets a balance between linguistic and social structures, as well as grammatical and social meanings; it also provides us with a balanced view, explaining properties of languages with reference to both external and internal factors.

Previous research has found that linguistic variation can be observed in the phonological (see Ramisch, 2010 for example) and morphological (see Poplack and Tagliamonte, 2004; Patrick, 2004 for example) domains.

Scholars are also interested in finding out the causes of variation in language, with multiple factors implicated. For example, the third person singular present suffix in AAVE is conditioned by several linguistic factors, such as subject type, phonological segment and verb aspect (Poplack and Tagliamonte, 2004). A number of previous studies also found that variation can be the result of both linguistic and social factors. For example, different patterns of realization of the past participle can be observed in Jamaican Creole (Patrick, 2004), and it is also found that these different variants are employed in different frequencies according to individual preference and verb types.

In sum, it can be found that each variety of English is variable in nature. Variation is also found to occur at phonological, morphological and morphosyntactic levels, and linguistic and socioeconomic factors have a combined influence on speakers' production of speech.

2.4.3.2 Variationist Perspective for SLA

Bayley (2007) advocates using a variationist approach for SLA. He argues that adopting a variationist perspective can help (1) study and test empirically the effect of a learner's mother tongue on his or her second language performance; (2) provide a detailed analysis of variable forms, as well as a more comprehensive picture of how target languages function; (3) test whether acquisition of target language “involves a process of repeated restructuring, or gradually along a multi-dimensional continuum”; (4) provide insights into how learners acquire, or fail to acquire, sociolinguistic competence (Bayley, 2007 p.136).

Bayley's view is echoed by Davydova (2012). In a review of Russian English, which is a learner English, and Indian English, a variety of New Englishes, he argues that learner Englishes should be considered self-contained forms of English because they demonstrate “a high degree of variability of linguistic items in a given language domain”. Davydova also believes that empirical data of learner Englishes can be compared with other recognized varieties of New Englishes. This comparison can “ultimately broaden the empirical basis of the variationist theory”. Moreover, Davydova states that acquisition of both learner Englishes and New Englishes in similar sociocultural settings, as well as through similar learning processes, may also result in similarities in some linguistic elements of the said varieties. At the end of his review, Davydova advocates seeking general descriptions of significant features of both learner Englishes and New Englishes.

The variationist paradigm is able to assess learners' learning processes. Through different stages, learners may adopt the same or different learning strategies. This can

be observed in a study carried out by Young (1991).

As will be discussed in detail in Section 5.3.2, Young's (1991) research also investigates how Chinese learners, who vary in English proficiency, use standard and non-standard plural marking. Results show that the animacy of nouns has different effects on learners who are highly proficient in English and those who are less proficient in English. The former group of learners tends to use standard plural marking in the presence of animate nouns, while the latter tends to use non-standard plural marking in the same condition.

Recall Section 2.4.1.2 which mentioned that scholars in EA believe that individual learners "may differ in the basic rate of the use of a variable rule" in spite of the fact that they share the same sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, the study mentioned above finds that these learners are nonetheless subject to the influences of certain linguistic constraints in the same way. In other words, although individual speakers may vary greatly in producing a certain variable, their productions of standard and non-standard forms are similarly influenced by the same linguistic constraints. Other studies also obtain similar findings. For example, Bayley and Langman (2004) find that Chinese learners using third person present suffix *-s* are under the multiple influences of perfectivity and individual English proficiency. Among these learners, their performance varies greatly, but nonetheless they are under the influences of the same constraints. The same research discovers a different pattern which can be observed among the learners from Hungary, who have a different sociocultural and linguistic background. In short, the variationist paradigm in this study reveals that learners from different linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds tend to undergo different learning processes even when they are learning the same target language.

In the context of HKE, the variationist paradigm is rarely adopted in the fields of SLA. To the best of my knowledge, only one of these previous studies is related to Hong Kong students' written errors. Law (2012) has found that in written English, Hong Kong students are able to correctly pluralize over 80% of count nouns. This study has also investigated the significance of several factors which may have an influence on Hong Kong students' usage of standard and non-standard plural marking. More details will be provided in the following quantitative analysis (Section 5).

Another previous study with similar research interest is conducted by Young (1991), who discovers a number of linguistic constraints governing Chinese speakers' production of standard and non-standard English plural marking. He also finds that variation exists between Chinese speakers themselves. More details will be provided in Section 5.3.2.

In sum, the variationist paradigm can complement EA, which faces criticism of being unable to provide a more comprehensive picture of learners' production. By adopting a variationist perspective, scholars will be able to provide a more comprehensive picture of learner languages, as they can compare how learners produce both standard and non-standard forms. Moreover, a variationist paradigm can assess learners' learning processes, as scholars can infer possible/probable causes behind learners' production. Therefore, the variationist paradigm can contribute further to language teaching and learning.

2.4.3.3 Insights into Hong Kong English

In the case of Hong Kong, the variationist paradigm may provide more

information on HKE. In both fields of SLA and World Englishes, very few studies are carried out in variationist perspective. Because of this, we do not know how often Hong Kong students produce standard and non-standard forms in formal English writing, and so we are unable to fully understand Hong Kong students' English writing performance. The variationist paradigm will also shed light on the linguistic constraints in HKE, and such discovery may also benefit English teaching and learning.

3. Data

This section covers the source of data, collection process, and basic information of contributors.

The Source of Data: Online Academic Forum

In the current thesis, I will obtain online written data instead of hand-written data. To convert hand-written data into electronic texts would prove a time-consuming process. Online data, on the other hand, are readily available in large number. More importantly, data written in WLHKE can be extracted from online forums in Hong Kong, as will be discussed in the next paragraphs.

Concerning the extraction of data from online forums, a number of online forums are available in Hong Kong. One of these forums is selected as the source of my data. The paragraphs below briefly discuss the background of this forum and the reasons behind my selection of this forum.

The articles come from an academic forum in Hong Kong, which is known as Little Soldier Forum (www.lsforum.net) and is a popular forum among Hong Kong students who are eager to seek help and advice on academic subjects, including English writing. This online forum was founded in 2006 and now claims to be the top forum of an academic nature (see Figure 3.1 below). Figures 3.1 and 3.2 show the homepage of Little Soldier Forum, and in the first figure, the slogan on the top left corner, “Little Soldier Forum: Place to Learn and Share”, clearly demonstrates that this forum is academic in nature.



Figure 3.1: Homepage of Little Soldier Forum with its Slogan

Figure 3.1 shows how the overall structure of Little Soldier Forum is organized into different forms (i.e. junior and senior forms) and subjects. Senior and junior form students share and ask questions in two different areas; their posts will be placed in different sections according to the subjects. Note that the Chinese slogan mentions that this forum is an “academic forum which is ranked the first in Hong Kong” (全港No.1 學術論壇).



Figure 3.2: Homepage of Little Soldier Forum showing the Sections

Although online forums are common in Hong Kong, very few of them are academic in nature. Most online forums do have academic sections in which students and other netizens can hold academic discussions, but many of them are not academic in nature, and so they contain other genres such as entertainment. Little Soldier Forum deals mainly with academic subjects, and so its overall structure is designed so that different academic subjects are classified into different sections, such as Language Section for Chinese and English subjects, Maths section, Science section, and so forth. Therefore, Little Soldier Forum, as a rare online academic forum in Hong Kong, serves as the platform where many local students ask and answer questions, post essays and seek advice etc. This forum therefore stands out as my choice due to its relatively huge popularity, guaranteeing large numbers of English essays and contributors. Its clear organization of different pages for different subjects also helps facilitate my collection of English writing in Language Section. Since my current study focuses on Hong Kong students' formal English writing, I consider Little Soldier Forum the best choice.

Figure 3.3 below shows the content page of Language Section, where students ask for questions related to English language and/or their examinations; some of the posts are related to English writing, which I will select for my current research.

標題	作者	回覆/查看	最後發表
[Eng] 英文點樣聽得?	1★ vicru 2014-12-27	3 / 495	2015-1-11 10:29 AM by S091220
[Eng] 2014 DSE 義務補習英文 Oral Discussion	starrydust 2015-1-4	8 / 492	2015-1-9 10:16 PM by kokachun826
[Eng] Popular Culture/ self-learner/ Thanks for your comment!	feifeifeifei 2014-11-25	7 / 541	2015-1-9 01:59 AM by haiso1898
[Eng] Writing: animal abuse	#308412 2014-10-28	7 / 574	2015-1-8 06:34 PM by #308412
[Eng] 英文作文求讚評	ck1022 2014-12-31	5 / 617	2015-1-8 05:52 PM by james20100101
[Eng] 求改文(SBA) 急	tfvbnhg 2015-1-3	4 / 324	2015-1-7 06:54 PM by tfvbnhg
[Eng] 2013 reading paper 要幾多percent 5**?	silly_boy123 2013-12-30	10 / 689	2015-1-7 05:46 PM by jordan980528
[Eng] reading 應做B1/B2? 求意見	2★ santana477 2014-1-8	7 / 642	2015-1-7 05:30 PM by jordan980528
[Eng] 英文求iv2	1★ kusollo123 2015-1-6	7 / 369	2015-1-6 11:49 PM by 努力沖dse
[Eng] 寫作求評分求讚!!!	1★ joeyyuyu96 2015-1-1	4 / 536	2015-1-4 02:05 PM by joeyyuyu96
[Eng] 討論2015 Mock Writing Part A Topic 2:	wongshingking 2015-1-4	0 / 242	2015-1-4 01:51 PM by wongshingking

Figure 3.3: Language Section in Little Solider Forum

Numbers of Articles Collected

For my current research, 509 articles were collected. Of these 509 articles, I was able to select 486 of them for analysis, because these articles were written for academic purpose, and thus fitted the criteria of the current study. Some articles are excluded because a number of them are repetitions, (i.e. posted more than once) and some of them are written for informal contexts e.g. entertainment.

Contributors

It is assumed that all the contributors are Hong Kong students preparing for the public examination, and so most of them are probably aged from 15 to 18. Some of these students post their English writing in this forum and ask for comments. Figure 3.4 shows an example of how they do so:

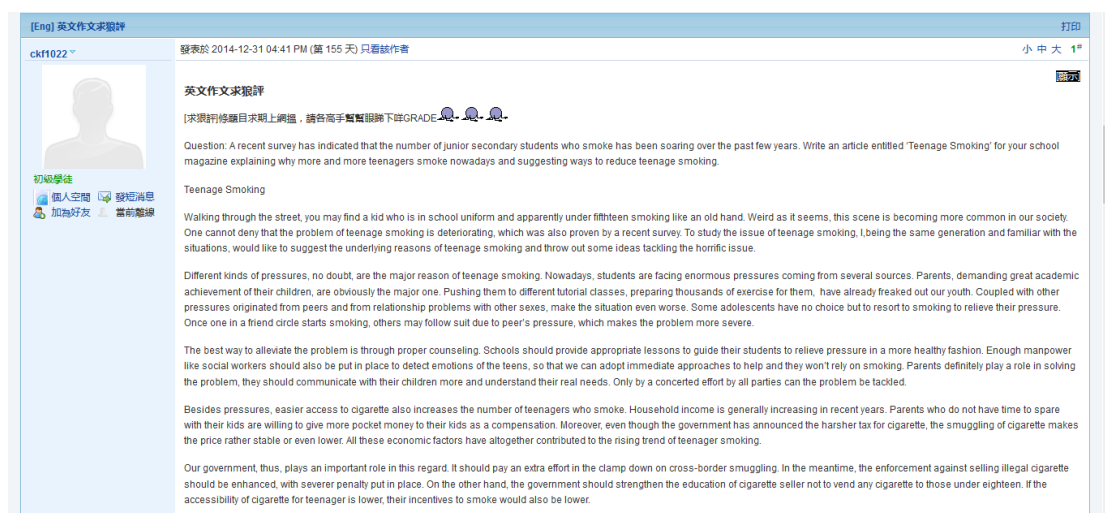


Figure 3.4: Example of a Student Asking for Feedback on His/her Writing

Basically, a student can simply post the topic and his or her article onto the forum. In the post in Figure 3.4, the Chinese title, which can be translated into “Please Comment on (my) English Writing [three emoticons of begging]”, clearly indicates the student’s request.

Content of Articles

Recall Section 2.4.2.2 which mentions that English in CMC tends to contain non-standard features, which can also be known as e-grammar. Although Little Soldier Forum is an online platform, some Hong Kong students visit this website for academic purpose: to upload essays and seek advice on how to write better for public examinations. Therefore, e-grammar is not expected in their essays. In other words, non-standard features found in their essays belong to WLHKE instead of CHKE.

As the contributors using Little Soldier Forum are preparing for the public examination, the format of the essays requires the students to use formal English when they compose their essays.

Most articles contain 400 to 800 words. These essays are dated from 2013 to 2015, meaning that the data allow us to investigate Hong Kong students' recent use of English.

Data Collection

The articles, which date from 2013 to 2015, were retrieved from January to March, 2015. In other words, the data represent the most recent English writing among the Hong Kong students. Starting from the first page of Language Section of Little Soldier Forum, I chose every piece of English writing posted by the students so as to avoid apriori judgement sampling (Shmueli et al., 2006). The content of each article, its author and date of post creation are recorded in a Microsoft Access database. The data can be found in Appendix 1.1

Contributors and Number of Articles

Microsoft Access allows me to generate a list of contributors together with the number of articles each of them has written. The total number of authors is 247. The minimum number of contribution is 1 article, while the maximum number is 23 articles. In order to avoid skewing the data, the data of those contributing more than 10 articles are capped, and so the number of articles for each contributor does not exceed 10; these ten articles would be the earliest collected ones.

4 Description of Grammatical Features of Written Learner Hong Kong English

The aim of this section is to provide a comprehensive description of the grammatical features of WLHKE by identifying all the localized features which are present in the first 20 essays in my data. In this section, I will also compare the features of WLHKE, CHKE and SHKE.

4.1 Method

4.1.1 Processes of Recording

HKE uses a diverse range of localized features. For this reason, the articles in my database are manually analysed. This manual process allows close inspection of all linguistic features of WLHKE in each article, so that the possible maximum number of localized features can be recorded. Due to the length of time required for manually analysing the data, only the first 20 articles are selected for investigation in this section.

4.1.2 Process of Analysis

A list of localized features of WLHKE will be provided together with their corresponding forms in Standard English. Definitions of different types of localized features are followed by examples extracted from the articles to highlight particular uses. To provide a comparison with Standard English, I draw on two grammar books,

namely The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language (CGEL) and Oxford Guide to English Grammar (OGEG).

During analysis, I will also briefly discuss how some of the localized features arise, such as overgeneralization, L1 interference and so forth.

The identification of localized features of WLHKE in my research will avoid using negative labels which are often adopted in the EA framework. While Anchimbe (2009) does not aim to criticise the EA framework, he argues that treating new Englishes as errors (as in the studies of bilingualism, second language acquisition, interlanguage etc.) may reflect social bias and prejudice towards these varieties. Therefore, in my current analysis, I will produce a list of localized features of WLHKE with new labels avoiding negative connotations of the labels used in the EA framework. For example, instead of using “wrong use of article”, I label the related features as “change of article”.

4.2 Analysis

As there are no definitive guides to localized morphosyntactic features in HKE, in my current analysis, I will use a bottom-up, exploratory approach to the data, in tandem with findings from previous research carried out in the EA framework, as these previous studies provide a key benchmark for my own analysis. In addition, I will concentrate on the most commonly produced localized features of WLHKE with forms produced by the contributors in my data. At the end of this section, I will also compare the features of WLHKE and those of CHKE and SHKE (evidence will be drawn from previous studies), so that I can find out similarities and differences

between the three varieties of HKE.

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Articles

In Standard English, articles include *a*, *an* and *the*. The first two articles are indefinite, while the third is a definite article.

Indefinite articles are used when the writer wants to describe and classify the target nouns.

(1) This is a nice place. (OGEG, 2002, p.198)

(2) ‘The Economist’ is a magazine. (OGEG, 2002, p.198)

Indefinite articles can be used when nouns have general meaning.

(3) A computer will only do what it's told to do. (OGEG, 2002, p.203)

Definite articles can also be used when the writers are referring to when the nouns have general meaning.

(4) The bicycle is a cheap means of transportation. (OGEG, 2002, p.198)

Note that when the nouns with general meaning are in plural form, the zero article replaces the definite article.

(5) Accidents can happen. (OGEG, 2002, p.198)

Uncountable nouns preceded by zero articles or definite articles can result in

different meanings. The subject in example (6) below refers to music in general, while that in example (7) refers to a specific piece of music.

(6) Music usually helps me relax. (OGEG, 2002, p.199)

(7) The music was far too loud. (OGEG, 2002, p.199)

According to the rules of Standard English, nouns should be preceded by articles in certain contexts. For example, most proper nouns belonging to continents, islands, countries, states and counties must be followed by zero article, but a few examples must be preceded by definite article *the*, such as *the UK* and *the USA*. Most of the other geographical nouns, such as mountains, lakes, cities, roads and so forth, follow zero articles as well; simultaneously, rivers, canals, cinemas, theatres, hotels and a number of other categories are usually preceded by definite article (for detail see OGEG, 2002, p.210-212).

In cases related to time, most nouns are preceded by the zero article, but when nouns are referring to specific time, definite and indefinite articles are required.

(8) If winter comes, can spring be far behind? (OGEG, 2002, p.208)

(9) the winter of 1947 (OGEG, 2002, p.208)

(10) a very cold winter (OGEG, 2002, p.207)

Names of people are proper nouns which are preceded by the zero article. A name following a title does not require a definite or indefinite article either. However, definite articles are used when writers use the title to refer to a known person and when writers use a surname to refer to a family, as shown in examples (11) and (12) below.

(11) the Prince of Wales

(12) the Johnson family

Omission of Article

In WLHKE, articles are sometimes omitted before nouns, probably because Chinese does not have any article. Therefore, this feature is likely to arise from L1 interference.

In some of the examples below, since the nouns have been mentioned previously, they should be preceded by an article when they are repeated (see A3 and A19 in appendix 1.1).

The victims do not seek help from police. (A5)

Eventually, the sense of reality of films will be low, making the audience unacceptable to spend money watching the film, then the whole film will be hard to be successful.

(A19)

Some nouns follow adjectives and therefore require the article *the* before the adjectives (see A3 above and A14 below).

In terms of language, the majority of Hong Konger nowadays have good command in speaking at least two languages, that are English and Cantonese so that it develops so called Hong Kong-styled English.

(A14)

The rest of the examples below include proper nouns and plural nouns which always must be preceded by article *the* (see A15 and A5).

The students could use such innovative devices for doing homework via internet, doing class-related research online, looking up words in dictionary and therefore improving their academic performance.

(A15)

Omission of the article is also reported in previous studies on WLHKE by Chu (1987), Chu (2005), Hui (2005), Kwan (1997), Lau (2005) and Paskewitz (1999). Lau mentions (2005) that students tend to be confused when they use articles; Kwan (1997), on the other hand, observes that students understand that they omit articles when they are reminded, and so they may have forgotten the rule of using articles when they are writing.

Change of Article

Hong Kong people sometimes choose an article for a noun, but when doing so they do not adhere to the rules of Standard English. Usually a subject being first mentioned should be preceded by *a* or *an* instead of *the* (see A2 and A14), but some Hong Kong people may not be aware of this.

Secondly, “CP of CNY” is a meaningful activity. It is giving the chance to students and elders to celebrate the Chinese New Year together.

(A2)

I am writing to express my grave concern over the local culture in

Hong Kong. The recent article criticizing that Hong Kong dose not have a strong culture.

(A14)

Uses of *a* and *an* also vary in some cases, as shown in A10.

Each class works as a team to perform an short stories about Internet addiction will be dedicated to the whole school on the hall stage.

(A10)

Varying usage of *a* replacing *an* is also reported in previous studies investigating WLHKE by Chu (1987), Chu (2005), Fong (1987), Hui (2005), Kwan (1997) and Lau (2005).

Addition of Article

In WLHKE, nouns are sometimes preceded by articles even though they are not required, probably because students over-apply the linguistic rules of articles for uncountable nouns, as shown in examples in A10 and A 15.

In addition, one of the major reasons for owning a smartphone is the entertainment.

(A15)

Some Hong Kong people also put in an additional article in phrases which do not have an article, as shown in the example in A11.

For an example, when somebody assisted them, they did not say "Thank you".

(A11)

Addition of redundant articles is also reported in previous studies on WLHKE by Chu (1987), Chu (2005), Hui (2005), Lau (2005) and Paskewitz (1999). Chu (2005) reports that a number of students provide unnecessary articles for words such as *university*, mistaking it as an object instead of a concept. In other words, misunderstanding of the nature of some words results in this non-standard feature.

4.3.2 Nouns

4.3.2.1 Nouns as Subjects and Objects

In most cases, a complete sentence, also known as a main clause, in Standard English should include a subject. Below is example (1) which demonstrates the linguistic elements of a clause.

(1) Subject Verb Complement

Example (2) is an example constructed according to the structure of (1) above.

(2) Our flight time will be approximately forty-five minutes. (OGEG, 2002, p.2)

Objects follow transitive verbs. The following is the structure of a complete sentence with transitive verb and object.

(3) Subject Verb Object

Example (4) demonstrates the linguistic elements of the structure of (3).

(4) Two stewards served lunch. (OGEG, 2002, p.4)

Context-based Omission of Subject

In some cases of subject omission, the subjects in fact can sometimes be found in other positions of the same sentence, or sometimes in the previous sentence. This feature is likely to arise from L1 interference, as Cantonese sometimes does not require a subject in a complete sentence.

As you can see teenagers are the future of the society. We have a responsibility to stop it and leading them to a healthy life. It is no choice that only if above all actions are done can reduce teenage smoking.

(A4)

Omission of subject is also reported in previous studies by Chu (2005) and Kwan (1997), and yet this non-standard feature is not frequent.

4.3.2.2 Plural Marking

In Standard English, most of the countable nouns referring to more than one person or thing require plural marking. Below are some examples of nouns in singular and plural forms. Note that they have other forms of pluralisation.

(1) dog dogs

(2) fox foxes

(3) child children

(4) mouse mice

(5) sheep sheep

On the other hand, uncountable nouns do not have plural forms, meaning that they also do not have a plural marker. Below is an example.

(6) information information

A compound noun consists of two linguistic elements which join to each other to form a compound. Compound nouns in plural form are attached with -s suffix to the second element, such as *grown-ups*, *overcoats*, *green houses*. Irregular suffixes are used when the second element of a compound noun has an irregular plural form, such as *grandchildren*.

In a few exceptional cases, plurality is realized in the first element, such as *men-of-war* and *passers-by*.

Addition of Plural Marker

Singular countable nouns are sometimes attached with plural markers in WLHKE; in some cases (see A13), in spite of the immediately preceding determiners specific for singular noun, the nouns are still attached with plural markers. This may be due to overgeneralization.

My friend, who is named Sammi, has been interested in debating for a

periods of time.

(A13)

The first elements in some compounds are also attached with the plural markers, as can be seen in A14.

Numerous local arts and internationally large-scale arts exhibitions are held in Hong Kong every year, such as Bruce Lee exhibition, Arts Basel in Hong Kong and international film festivals.

(A14)

Some uncountable nouns are also attached with plural markers, as shown in A15.

In the first place, Smartphone has its function to bring more convenience, that device enables people to make their works efficiently and practically;...

(A15)

Redundant plural marking for singular count nouns and uncountable nouns is also reported in studies by Chu (1987), Chu (2005), Hui (2005), Kwan (1997) and Paskewitz (1999).

Omission of Plural Marker

In WLHKE, plural markers are sometimes omitted for countable nouns in plural form. Sometimes Hong Kong people do not attach plural nouns to the nouns which include more than one member. Since Cantonese does not have plural marking, this

feature is likely to arise from L1 interference.

Hong Kong is part of China, and the majority of Hong Konger is Chinese so that Hong Kong retains Chinese traditions and confucianism.

(A14)

Budge (1989), Chu (1987), Chu (2005), Hui (2005), Law (2012), Kwan (1997), Paskewitz (1999) and Wong (1985) also report omission of plural marking in their studies investigating WLHKE.

4.3.2.3 Pronouns

Pronouns are used for references to people and things (including animals and plants). In Standard English, pronouns have limitations in their references, and so they should be used according to the narrative point of view, number and sometimes gender. For example, a female should only be paired with singular feminine pronouns *she*, *her*, *hers* and *herself*.

Lack of Agreement between Noun-Pronoun

In WLHKE, a noun in a sentence may not agree with its corresponding pronoun. In some cases, as in the example in A17, one may argue that the noun lacks its plural marker, but actually the corresponding pronoun may also be rewritten (e.g. *each of them*) to fit the singular noun. Therefore, these confusing cases are categorized as *lack of agreement between noun-pronoun* instead of *omission of plural marker*.

Moreover, if people can cultivate a habit of using bicycle for travelling, they can do exercise regularly, which in turn helps them build a strong body, and it therefore prevents them from getting ill easily.

(A17)

It is also found that a string of nouns may be considered as singular *it* instead of plural *they*, as in the example in A7.

In conclusion, from certain extents, exams and test are barriers in learning, it gives too much pressure on students and emotional problems and students may lose their self esteem.

(A7)

Lack of agreement between nouns and pronouns is also reported in the study by Paskewitz (1999).

4.3.3 Preposition and Prepositional Phrases

Prepositions can also serve as the head of a phrase, which is called a prepositional phrase. Prepositional phrases in Standard English function as non-predicative adjuncts, and most prepositions also have complement function in forms of prepositional phrases.

As a non-predicative adjunct, a prepositional phrase does not have any predicative relation to the subject, and so both examples below are grammatically correct.

(1) Ahead of the ship, there was a small island. (CGEL, 2004, p.604)

(2) Ahead of the ship, the captain saw an island on which to land. (CGEL, 2004, p.604)

Prepositional phrases can appear as adverbials and complements, as are the cases in examples (3) and (4) below.

(3) I put it in the drawer. (CGEL, 2004, p.605)

(4) Jill is in the office. (CGEL, 2004, p.605)

Prepositions are also an important element in some idiomatic and fossilised expressions, such as *for example*, *under protest*, *in person*, and so forth. Again, the prepositions in these expressions are not usually deleted or changed.

Preposition Replacement

In WLHKE, prepositions which are used less often may be replaced by other prepositions which are more commonly used. Also, some Hong Kong people do not always know which particular preposition should be used in a certain phrase or following a certain word. Therefore, some words and phrases which require specific prepositions are vulnerable to preposition replacement. Below is an example (*from certain extents* instead of *to certain extents*):

In conclusion, from certain extents, exams and test are barriers in learning, it gives too much pressure on students and emotional problems and students may lose their self esteem.

(AW7)

Misuses of prepositions are also reported in studies by Chan (2003), Chu (1987), Chu (2005), Hui (2005), Kwan (1997), Paskewitz (1999) and Wong (1985). Misuse of prepositions probably arises from confusion, as students are not certain which to use (Hui, 2005). Students encounter more difficulties when the prepositions are not related to time and space (Chu, 2005).

4.3.4 Sentence Structures

4.3.4.1 Sentence Structures and Patterns

Declarative and interrogative sentences serve different purposes. The former express statements while the latter raise a question. In Standard English, declarative and interrogative sentences have different sentence patterns, as shown in examples (1) and (2) below.

(1) Declarative:

Subject + Nil/Auxiliary + Verb + Nil/Complement/Object/Adverbial

(2) Interrogative:

Nil/Question word + Auxiliary + Subject + Verb + Nil/Complement/Object/Adverbial

Note that in (1) and (2) that the positions of modal verbs cannot be altered because they are fixed. In declarative sentences, auxiliary verbs, if present, follow the subjects; in interrogative sentences, auxiliary verbs precede the subjects.

Examples (3) and (4) below are sentences constructed according to the structures mentioned in (1) and (2) respectively.

(3) You have written a letter. (OGEG, 2002, p.25)

(4) What have you written? (OGEG, 2002, p.25)

In most cases, a complete sentence should have the following basic structures.

(5) Subject Verb Complement

A sentence with the above structure should have a subject and a verb. Imperative sentences, which usually express warnings, reminders, good wishes and so forth, are exceptions, as they do not require a subject. Verbs are the base form of imperative sentences, as shown in example (6).

(6) Come in. (OGEG, 2002, p.21)

The example of *come in* is a message delivered from a person to another person, and so omission of the subject in imperative sentences is grammatically acceptable. The same, however, cannot be applied to declarative and interrogative sentences.

Inversion of Sentence Patterns

In WLHKE, declarative and interrogative sentence structures are sometimes inverted, probably because of L1 interference, as the patterns for both declarative and

interrogative sentences in Cantonese do not differ from each other. In WLHKE, some interrogative sentences are constructed in declarative structure.

Why this situation happened in our society?

Dependent clauses which require declarative structure are also found to be written in interrogative structure.

In addition, students are taught about what are the symptoms of their addictions like become furious at who advising them to take a rest, which are sorts of self-examinations.

(A10)

Inversion of sentence structures is also reported in previous studies by Chan (1987), Chu (2005), Kwan (1997), Paskewitz (1999) and Wong (1985).

Fragmentized Sentence

In WLHKE, some incomplete sentences are formed because only the dependent clause exists (A11a, A5), or because the independent clause lacks subject (A11b) and/or verb (A17). Since they appear as fragments, here they are defined as fragmentized sentences. It is likely that L1 interference leads to this type of localized feature, because Cantonese sentence formation is more flexible (Leung & Li, 2016).

Consequently, decreasing the emission of CO2 from the procedure of making drugs and transportation which use a lot of electricity produced by burning fossils.

(A17)

a. Including have a emotion swings ,depression and even suicide.

b. Under no circumstance , not to over protect your children.

(A11)

The victims do not seek help from police. Since they are unwilling to see that their beloved are arrested.

(A5)

Note that A11b does not have any subject or verb, which is different from both *Omission of Subject* and *Context-based Omission of Subject*, as these two features indicate that a sentence simply does not have subject.

Fragmentized sentences are also reported in a study by Chu (2005), who states that sentence fragments tend to arise when students start their sentences with conjunctions such as *because*, *although* and so on.

Sentence-end Tag

In each of the examples below, a tag can be found at the end of the sentence which, grammatically, has no relation with the sentence. However, in both cases, the tags seem to play a supplementary and an emphatic role respectively.

This place has its characteristics and culture, and hence flourishing.

(A14)

4.3.4.2 Conjunctions

Sentences can be formed by combining two or more clauses with coordinating conjunctions such as *and*, *or*, *but*, *so* and many others (for details see OGEG, 2002, p.324 - 326).

(1) Tom had no food, and he had to pay the rent.

Some adverbs, known as *conjunctive adverbs* and *linking adverbs*, serve similar functions to conjunctions. These conjunctive adverbs connect the meanings of adjacent sentences. Examples include *however*, *although*, *whereas*, *nevertheless* and so forth (for details, see OGEG, 2002, p.276-277)

Conjunction Formation

Conjunction formation is defined as words of other parts of speech becoming conjunctions.

Although the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty, the traditional western culture and core value still thrive in Hong Kong; for instance, liberty, democracy and rule of law.

(A14)

Even they wish to do so, the abusers will threaten them to not contact with others.

(A5)

Omission of Conjunction

In WLHKE, it is found that sometimes two sentences are linked together without any conjunction. It is likely to arise from L1 interference, because sentence formation in Cantonese is more flexible. In the examples below, the whole sentence which is not preceded by a conjunction will be underlined.

An old saying goes, ‘Rome was not built in a day’, education is crucial for our upcoming society.

(A3)

This is because most students have to share the same locker with three or above classmates, many of them had have conflicts on how to use a locker in a fair way.

(A16)

In conclusion, from certain extents, exams and test are barriers in learning, it gives too much pressure on students and emotional problems and students may lose their self esteem.

(A7)

Omission of conjunctions is also reported in Chu (2005).

Omission of Comma before Conjunction

Conjunctions are sometimes preceded by a comma when the conjunctions link the two clauses, but in some articles written by Hong Kong people, the comma may be omitted. The two conjunctions, *so* and *so that*, seem more likely to be involved.

No one wish to be abused by beloved one so all of us have to do something to ameliorate the circumstance.

(A5)

In view of student, smartphones provide users with access to unlimited information at any time or in any place so that knowledge is much more accessible nowadays.

(A15)

4.3.4.3 Relative Clauses

In Standard English, relative clauses are a type of sub-clause which modifies nouns and sometimes clauses. Relative pronouns can be either absent or present, as shown in examples (1) and (2) below.

(1) the team wearing red (OGEG, 2002, p.356)

(2) the team who were wearing red (OGEG, 2002, p.356)

Prepositions related to verbs are realized when the verbs follow the relative pronouns. Examples (3) and (4) show how prepositions are placed in different ways.

(3) I'll introduce you to the man who/that I share a flat with. (OGEG, 2002, p.361)

(4) the city to which I flew (CGEL, 2004, p.275)

Addition of Preposition before Relative Pronouns

Additional prepositions can be found before relative pronouns, probably because Hong Kong students believe that these preceding prepositions are necessary for relative pronouns. The reason behind this is unclear, and based on the information obtained in the current analysis, a conclusion cannot be drawn.

Thus, in this article I would like to discuss this issue in detail, for which has an escalating trend of the teenage smoking nowadays...

(A4)

As the chairperson of the Social Services Club in which always shows caring to social issues through various activities,...

(A10)

4.3.5 Verbs

4.3.5.1 Main Verbs

Verbs can describe actions and states. Action verbs, such as *buy* and *need*, refer to things which happen and change, while state verbs, such as *exist* and *know*, refer to being, having, holding opinions and entertaining feelings.

A verb is essential in a complete sentence, as shown in the structure below.

(1) Subject Verb Nil/Object/Complement/adverbial

Verbs can be transitive and intransitive. Transitive verbs must be followed by objects, while intransitive verbs do not require any object. However, intransitive verbs can be followed by complements and/or adverbials. Below are two examples containing transitive and intransitive verbs respectively, and another example with an intransitive verb followed by a complement.

(2) The detective arrested the thief. (OGEG, 2002, pp6)

(3) A coach stopped. (OGEG, 2002, pp6)

(4) The detective became an inspector. (OGEG, 2002, pp6)

The abovementioned verbs are known as finite verbs, or main verbs. A complete sentence normally has one main verb. When more than one main verb is present, a conjunction such as *and* is required.

Prepositions are closely associated with some verbs. These verbs are known as prepositional verbs which contain verbs, specific prepositions and related complements. Below are some examples.

(5) I referred to her books. (CGEL, 2004, p.275)

(6) I came across some old letters. (CGEL, 2004, p.275)

Addition of Preposition for Verb

A number of verbs which are not followed by any preposition in Standard English are attached to a preposition in WLHKE. In some rarer cases, an additional

preposition is attached to a verb which is already followed by a preposition.

When the teacher are required to teach for fewer students, spare time is squeezed out and used to instill additional wisdom such as Confucianism.

(A3)

As a result, we are working through with the Broad Game Club see that we can lend all the puzzle game, say, the renowned "Monopoly", so that students can have fun with their buddies after school instead of running to home for the Internet.

(A10)

Moreover, the government has recently endeavored to boost up the creative industries by going to Korea to seek for experience,...

(A14)

Redundant addition of prepositions for verbs is also reported in studies by Chan (1987) and Kwan (1997).

4.3.5.2 Modal Verbs

Modal verbs precede main verbs in verb phrases. Tenses will be realized in modal verbs if they are present, leaving the main verbs in bare infinitive form.

Modal verbs in participle form are not always in the past tense. For example:

(1) You can/could go on the train, of course. (OGEG, 2002, p.123)

Note that *could* in the example above is not the past tense of *can*. Instead, *could* refers to the uncertain prediction.

Would is a modal verb used in unreal situation.

(2) It would be nice to have a barbecue. (OGEG, 2002, p.126)

The same modal verb *would* can also be used in a less direct and more tentative request.

(3) Would you pass me the sugar? (OGEG, 2002, p.126)

Overgeneralization of Use for Modal Verb

Modal verbs with past participle are generally used when the speaker is not entirely certain about the prediction, or when they are being more tentative in making requests. However, in some cases of WLHKE, when we look into the contexts, it seems probable that the sentences are stating facts with high certainty, so modal verbs with past participle should be avoided. Students may over-apply the rules of using modal verbs in past participle form.

In addition, students are taught about what are the symptoms of their addictions like become furious at who advising them to take a rest, which are sorts of self-examinations. Even though some of them are not anyone of the victims got reported massively, students can ask for counselling and preventive measures could be taken individually.

(A10)

In terms of filmming, they could learn many techniques in video making, such as shooting, video editing, programming, etc.

(A13)

Moreover, the students use the modal verbs inconsistently, as in the example in A3.

For long term speaking, our society can still be benefited from aforementioned policy... Not only could the society be benefitted, but also our students are.

(A3)

4.3.5.3 Tenses

Tenses are usually realized in form of morphology and/or presence of modal verbs.

Simple Present Tense

Simple present tense is used for states, such as feelings, opinions, relations and so forth.

(1) This book belongs to my sister. (OGEG, 2002, p.83)

Simple present tense can also be used for actions which are routines and habits

which are repeated again and again for a long period of time. Very often, permanent facts are also expressed in simple present tense.

(2) Bob works in Avonmouth. He usually drives to work. (OGEG, 2002, p.84)

(3) Food gives you energy. (OGEG, 2002, p.84)

Future events which occur according to a fixed timetable are also expressed in simple present tense.

(4) The ferry gets into Rotterdam at six o'clock tomorrow morning. (OGEG, 2002, p.85)

Simple Past Tense

Simple past tense is used for actions which occur in the past and are over in the present.

(5) The shop opened last week. (OGEG, 2002, p.87)

For actions which occur repeatedly and states which remained the same in the past, simple past tense is also used.

(6) The children always played in the garden. (OGEG, 2002, p.87)

(7) The Romans had a huge Empire. (OGEG, 2002, p.87)

Simple Future Tense

Simple future tense is used when an action occurs in the future. Modal verbs *will* and *shall* are often used, though *shall* is often used for first person narrative mode.

(8) This book will change your life. (OGEG, 2002, p.97)

(9) We will have/shall have another opportunity soon. (OGEG, 2002, p.97)

Simple future tense also expresses the future as facts which cannot be controlled, as well as a prediction and/or definite opinion about the future.

(10) Southern England will stay cloudy and windy tonight. (OGEG, 2002, p.97)

Future tense can also be expressed in the form of *be going to*, and this form is a base form for a present situation pointing to the future.

(11) It's ten already. We're going to be late. (OGEG, 2002, p.97)

Present Continuous Tense

Present continuous tense is used for actions which have happened over a period of time, with the actions continuing up until the present moment (i.e. the actions are not finished yet).

(12) Hurry up. Your friends are waiting for you. (OGEG, 2002, p.83)

Future events which have been arranged are also expressed in present continuous tense.

(13) Sadie is coming to stay with us next week. (OGEG, 2002, p.85)

Past Continuous Tense

Past continuous tense is used for actions which acted as the background to a punctual event.

(14) At quarter to eleven I was walking home. (OGEG, 2002, p.90)

Future Continuous Tense

Future continuous tense expresses an action which lasts over a period of future time.

(15) I can't meet you at four. I'll be working. (OGEG, 2002, p.99)

Routine actions which will occur in the future can also be expressed in future continuous tense.

(16) I'll be phoning my mother tonight. I always phone her on Fridays. (OGEG, 2002, p.100)

To express a future action which has been arranged, we can also use *be* followed by a to-infinitive.

(17) The Prime Minister is to visit Budapest. (OGEG, 2002, p.100)

Present Perfect Tense

Present perfect tense is used when an action is in the period lasting up to the present moment.

(18) The shop has just opened. (OGEG, 2002, p.86)

Present perfect tense can also describe experiences, actions and states which are repeated.

(19) Debbie has been to Scotland twice. (OGEG, 2002, p.86)

(20) I've ridden lots of times. (OGEG, 2002, p.86)

(21) I've had these skis for years. (OGEG, 2002, p.86)

A few time expressions are used together with present perfect tense, such as *already, recently, ever/never, for two weeks, since 1989* and so forth.

Past Perfect Tense

When an action occurs before a past period of time, it is expressed in past perfect tense.

(22) She had met Max six months before. (OGEG, 2002, p.92)

(23) We ran onto the platform, but the train had just gone. (OGEG, 2002, p.92)

Future Perfect Tense

Future perfect tense expresses an action which is being looked back on from the future, and the said action will also be over in the future.

(24) I'll have finished this book soon. I'm nearly at the end. (OGEG, 2002, p.102)

Present Perfect Continuous Tense

Present perfect continuous tense is used for an action which has occurred for a period of time and which occurs up to the present moment.

(25) I've been waiting for three years. (OGEG, 2002, p.91)

Past perfect continuous tense

Past perfect continuous tense is used for an action which started in the past and continued up until another time in the past.

(26) The driver who died in the accident had been drinking. (OGEG, 2002, p.93)

In summary, tenses in Standard English are important for expressing specific time reference.

Simplification of Tense

Tenses are sometimes simplified in Hong Kong people's writing. This occurs most often with present perfect tense, which is transformed into simple present tense, as the authors may not be aware that some keywords, like *recent* and *recently*, should be followed by present perfect tense.

But in recent years, smoking is becoming just as popular, especially for the junior secondary students.

(A4)

Recently, we notice that your fitness centre is being renovated, and will have some old and unwanted sports equipment replaced.

(A20)

Addition of Third Person Singular Suffix

In WLHKE, some verbs are attached to a third person singular suffix probably because the authors are not aware that the preceding nouns are in plural form. In some cases, as shown in the example in A13, the verb in to-infinitive is also attached to the third person singular suffix, probably because the authors think that the same rule should be applied on both the main verbs and to-infinitives in the presence of singular subjects.

In addition to encouraging students to make their own video on youtube, this article aims to explains its obvious benefits.

(A13)

Why don't the governmentsets up a hotline which allows the residents to share their burdens?

(A5)

In the example in A7, the singular noun in a prepositional phrase which follows the subject in plural form is followed by the main verb, so the author may think that the verb should have a third person singular suffix.

These days many students in Hong Kong claim that they are having too many tests and exams because of the exam-oriented education system.

(A7)

Omission of Third Person Singular Suffix

In WLHKE, while third person singular suffix is sometimes attached to a verb which does not require it, this suffix is sometimes omitted when a verb follows a singular subject. It may be due to L1 interference, because Cantonese does not have third person singular suffix.

Through implementing some kinds of subsidy and housing policy by the government, it can reduce the cost of bringing up children and therefore can encourage more couples to give birth to young, which in turn increase the birth rate and reduces the ratio of the elderly and teenagers in the long run.

(A18)

a Thus , it inevitably extend the duration of commuting , also the transportation expenditure may increase due to the longer travel distance and the climbing demand for faster transportation to arrive the workplace on time .

b To conclude, the loss of filming in the city centre is irreversible and enormous, and outweigh the gain form it .

(A6)

Because every student want to pass their exams with flying colors.

(A7)

Examples with verbs omitting third person singular present suffix can be found in the studies by Chan (1987) and Chu (2005), both of whom report that some students do not know whether some nouns (e.g. *mathematics*) and pronouns (e.g. *somebody* and *everybody*) are singular or plural.

Omission of Participle Suffix

In WLHKE, some verbs lack the participle suffix when they are in the passive voice or perfect tenses, probably because the students are being influenced by Cantonese, which does not have a participle suffix for verbs. In the examples in A2 and A11, the verbs involved are not preceded by the commonest *be*, but they are still constructed in the passive voice.

Hence, I decide to hold two activities ,call “Red Packet to elder” and “CP of CNY” which means Celebration Party of Chinese New Year for elder.

(A2)

First of all, to get invole in different club is a good opportunity to be independent for the child.

(A11)

Also, exams can motivate students to learn and revise what they have learn.

(A7)

Omission of participle suffix is also reported in studies by Chan (1987) and Kwan (1997).

Addition of Participle Suffix

A participle suffix is sometimes attached to verbs which do not require it, as students may over-apply the rules of using participle suffix. In some examples (A3, A9) below, the authors clearly do not realize that the main verbs in the sentences do not match in term of tenses.

It is true that ‘small class teaching’ may plague the school finical status in a trouble leading to unemployment and closedown of school eventually, but it was just a scar exaggerated by opponent.

(A3)

In others, such as A7, based on the context, the verbs should be in present or present perfect tenses, as the actions are supposed to be conducted at the present or recent periods of time.

Some education experts asserted that exams and tests are essential to access student’s performance and learning progress.

(A7)

Redundant addition of participle suffix is also reported in a study by Chan (1987), who mentions that some students used past tenses throughout their whole piece of writing when they were asked to write a composition on how a student had coped with depression. A second part of the task was to offer suggestions to others, and when offering suggestions, students should use verbs mainly in the present tense, and so it may reflect that they fail to understand the application of past participles.]

4.3.5.4 Uses of *Be*

In Standard English, *be* can act as a linking verb.

This word has different forms when preceded by different subjects. Table 4.1 shows forms of *be* according to narrative points of view and time.

First person	I	am (was)
	We	are (were)
Second Person	You (Singular)	are (were)
	You (Plural)	are (were)
Third Person	He	is (was)
	She	is (was)
	It	is (was)
	They	are (were)

Table 4.1: Forms of *Be* according to Narrative Point of View and Time

As a linking verb, *be* is followed by complements or adverbials. Below are two examples.

(1) The world is a wonderful place. (OGEG, 2002, p.105)

(2) I'm on a diet. (OGEG, 2002, p.9)

In passive voice, *be* is also an essential element.

(3) They play the match. (OGEG, 2002, p.143)

(4) The match is played. (OGEG, 2002, p.143)

Regardless of the tenses, such as continuous and perfect tenses, *be* is still required in a passive sentence. Below are examples of passive sentences with past continuous tense (5) and (6), and those with past perfect tense (7) and (8).

(5) They were playing the match. (OGEG, 2002, p.143)

(6) The match was being played. (OGEG, 2002, p.143)

(7) They had played the match. (OGEG, 2002, p.143)

(8) The match had been played. (OGEG, 2002, p.143)

In continuous tenses, *be* is also required before the main verb.

(9) The neighbours are being noisy today. (OGEG, 2002, p.106)

Agreement Variation of Be

Variation between *was* and *were* has been observed and discussed in previous studies investigating other varieties of English (see Tagliamonte and Smith, 1998 for example). In my data, it is also found that Hong Kong Chinese speakers tend to vary in the usages of *is* and *are*, *was* and *were*.

According to a research done by the Chinese University of Hong Kong, every 1 in 1425 people were not satisfied with their housing.

(A1)

In some cases, as shown in the example of A2 below, Hong Kong students produce non-standard *be* because they use non-standard plural forms for the subjects in their sentences. In the example below, the second *elder* should be in plural form. However, missing the plural –s, it becomes a singular form, and the author uses *is* instead of *are* because grammatically it adheres to the standard rule. In other words, production of (non-)standard singular and/or plural nouns may have an influence on that of (non-)standard *be* in WLHKE.

In addition, there seems to be an unavoidable generation gap between students and the elders due to the fact that students like playing with friends, smartphone and more, but elder is not.

(A2)

Agreement variation between singular and plural *be* is also reported in studies by Kwan (1997) and Wong (1985). This non-standard feature may reflect that students fail to understand the rule of subject-verb agreement.

Emphatic Be and Shift to Passive Voice

While *be* is sometimes omitted in the passive voice, Hong Kong Chinese speakers put in an additional *be* before main verbs in the active voice, probably because they want to emphasize the actions, replacing *do* in Standard English. One example can be found in A4.

However, teenagers are still have a chance received the information of the bacco.

(A4)

Above behavior would be affected their relationship in school.

(A11)

Teachers can give hand to students who are lag behind of others.

(A7)

Note that the example in A11 contains the key verb (*affected*) which is attached to a past participle suffix, while in the two examples in A4 and A7, the key verbs do not have any past participle suffix. Therefore it is possible that the author of A11 uses *be* for passive voice instead of putting emphasis on the main verbs. However, it is also possible that the author wants to put emphasis on the main verb by adding *be* and does not intend to use the passive voice, but the computer's auto-correct function may have influenced the author to change the main verbs into past participle form.

Moreover, one can also argue that the author of A7 misunderstands the (part of speech) the function of the word *lag*, mistaking it as adjective instead of verb, and so he or she is not using *be* as an emphatic word. However, information regarding the

author's knowledge of English grammar is lacking, and so I cannot decide which type of feature it belongs to.

Therefore, more detail is required with regard to emphatic *be* and shift to passive voice to establish how/why students produce these non-standard forms.

A few examples containing *be* before main verbs in active voice can also be found in studies by Chu (1987), who believes addition of *be* is “a hypercorrection of application of tense marker to the verb”, which means that Hong Kong students use *be* as a marker of tense – and so tense is realized not in the main verb, but in *be*. Moreover, Chu (1987) also finds some examples of active voice being changed into passive voice, probably because some Hong Kong students cannot judge the transitivity of the verbs involved.

Shift to passive voice is also reported in studies by Chan (1987), Kwan (1997) and Paskewitz (1999).

4.3.5.5 Gerunds and Infinitives

Gerunds and infinitives are verb forms in Standard English.

Gerunds

Gerunds have an *-ing* form for the verbs. They can be verbs on their own, or attached to objects, or attached to adverbials. Below are two examples.

(1) No one likes washing the car. (OGEG, 2002, p.160)

(2) Going on holiday always makes me feel uneasy. (OGEG, 2002, p.160)

Subjects can also come before the gerund, as shown in the example below.

(3) I dislike people asking me personal questions. (OGEG, 2002, p.160)

Gerunds can also act as the subject in a sentence.

(4) Keeping a copy of your letters is a good idea. (OGEG, 2002, p.161)

Some verbs are followed by gerunds, as shown in the examples below.

(5) Someone suggested going for a walk. (OGEG, 2002, p.161)

(6) Do you mind waiting a moment? (OGEG, 2002, p.161)

(7) How can they justify lives being put at risk? (OGEG, 2002, p.162)

Some verbs require prepositions and gerunds.

(8) Jake is thinking of selling his motor-bike. (OGEG, 2002, p.162)

(9) They prevented me from speaking. (OGEG, 2002, p.163)

Some nouns are followed by prepositions and gerunds.

(10) We expressed our gratitude for having had the opportunity. (OGEG, 2002, p.165)

A number of prepositions are also followed by gerunds.

(11) Instead of landing at Heathrow, we had to go to Manchester. (OGEG, 2002, p.165)

(12) Please switch off the lights before leaving. (OGEG, 2002, p.165)

Infinitives

In Standard English, infinitives are divided into to-infinitives and bare infinitives. Both of these infinitives are the base forms of verbs. Although no difference in meaning exists between *sit* (bare infinitive) and *to sit* (to-infinitive), the two infinitives are used in different grammatical contexts.

To-infinitives are verbs which are preceded by the preposition *to*. A simple infinitive expresses an action or an event in the same time as in the main clause.

(13) I'm pleased to meet you. (OGEG, 2002, p.145)

(14) You were lucky to win. (OGEG, 2002, p.145)

In example (13), both meeting and feeling pleasure occur at the same time in the present; in example (14) both winning and being lucky occurred at the same time in the past.

A perfect infinitive expresses an action or an event happening before the time of the main clause.

(15) I'd like to have seen that programme yesterday. (OGEG, 2002, p.145)

In example (15), the desire to see the programme is in the present, but the programme was in the past.

To-infinitives also have continuous forms, which describe an action or an event occurring over a period of time.

(16) You're lucky to be winning. (OGEG, 2002, p.145)

In example (16), winning continues from the past to the present moment.

To-infinitives can have objects and/or adverbials.

(17) A ride on a London bus is the best way to see the city. (OGEG, 2002, p.146)

(18) We need to act quickly. (OGEG, 2002, p.146)

To-infinitives can also act as subjects and/or complements in sentences.

(19) To defrost this fridge takes ages. (OGEG, 2002, p.147)

(20) Melanie's ambition is to go to Australia. (OGEG, 2002, p.147)

Some verbs are often followed by to-infinitives, such as *seem*, *happen*, *tend*, *turn out* and so forth.

(21) The plane seemed to be losing height. (OGEG, 2002, p.148)

Some verbs are followed by objects and to-infinitives.

(22) I expected Dave to meet me at the airport. (OGEG, 2002, p.151)

Some adjectives are also followed by to-infinitives.

(23) It was marvellous to visit the Grand Canyon. (OGEG, 2002, p.153)

(24) It's too difficult to work the figures out in your head. (OGEG, 2002, p.154)

To-infinitives can also modify some nouns.

(25) There will be an opportunity to inspect the plans. (OGEG, 2002, p.155)

Question words can also be followed by to-infinitives, and the words most often used are *what* and *how*.

(26) I just don't know what to say. (OGEG, 2002, 156)

(27) Have you any idea how to open this packet? (OGEG, 2002, p.156)

Bare-infinitives usually follow some of the modal verbs.

(28) Nothing can go wrong. (OGEG, 2002, p.158)

Bare infinitives also follow words such as *had better*, *would rather/would sooner* and *rather than*.

(29) Do you think I'd better call a doctor? (OGEG, 2002, p.119)

(30) I'd rather walk than hang around for a bus. (OGEG, 2002, p.126)

A few verbs, notably *make*, *let* and *have*, are followed by objects and bare infinitives.

(32) The official made me fill in a form. (OGEG, 2002, p.158)

(33) The headmaster let the pupils go home early. (OGEG, 2002, p.158)

(34) I'll have the porter bring up your luggage. (OGEG, 2002, p.158)

Some verbs related to perception also precede objects and bare infinitives

(35) Someone saw the men leave the building. (OGEG, 2002, p.158)

(36) I thought I heard someone knock on the door. (OGEG, 2002, p.158)

In summary, the uses of gerunds and infinitives in Standard English have many restrictions, (especially) notably that some verbs can only be followed by gerunds, to-infinitives or bare infinitives.

Bare Infinitive Formation

In WLHKE, bare infinitives may be formed in contexts which, according to Standard English, do not require any bare infinitive. In the example in A7 below, one may argue that two main verbs exist without conjunction between them, but a closer look reveals that the second verb is specifically inserted for the object (the *label effects*, which is the object, *occur*). Therefore, the author may in fact intend to form a bare infinitive which acts as an emphatic or supplementary role describing the object.

On the other hand, exams will lead labeling effects occur.

(A7)

Gerund-infinitives Conversion

The uses of gerunds, to-infinitives and bare infinitives are sometimes replaced with one another (e.g. gerunds being replaced by infinitives and vice versa) in the articles written by people from Hong Kong. It is obvious that they often fail to realize that certain words and phrases specially require gerunds or infinitives.

We have a responsibility to stop it and leading them to a healthy life.

(A4)

It is kinds of extracurricular activity by which promoting both arts and being a temperate netizen.

(A10)

I hope the above suggestions are capable to discover more violence cases which allow us to interfere in it and reduce the number of these misfortunes.

(A5)

Varying usages of gerunds and infinitives are also reported in studies by Chan (1987), Chu (1987) and Kwan (1997). Chan (1987) states that exercises in the textbooks may have caused confusion among students, because in many exercises, students are required to fill in gerunds and infinitives, and so students find it difficult to remember which verbs should be followed by gerunds and/or infinitives.

Gerund Formation

Some Hong Kong people may use a gerund even though a corresponding noun is available. While one can argue that this kind of gerund formation, as shown in the example in A1, is grammatically correct, it remains highly unnatural in Standard English.

Therefore, government should have a better planning and redevelop the old areas to build more houses for Hong Kong.

(A1)

In other examples, like those in A3 and A14, gerund formation occurs when a phrase or sentence requires a main verb, but the main verb has been transformed into a gerund without any preceding *be*.

As our society facing the problem, low fertility rate, school cannot get adequate admission.

(A3)

The recent article criticizing that Hong Kong dose not have a strong culture.

(A14)

Verbs in passive voice are also vulnerable to gerund formation, as shown in example in A10.

Students are required to search the information of Internet addiction themselves, have discussion and make the props needed, which is regarding as self-learning.

(A10)

4.3.6 Vocabulary

4.3.6.1 Parts of Speech

In Standard English, every word (has its) belongs to a part of speech, also known as *word class*. Words can be divided into the following groups: *nouns*, *verbs*, *adjectives*, *adverbs*, *prepositions*, *determiners*, *pronouns* and *conjunctions*.

Some words have multiple parts of speech. For example, *watch* can be a noun and a verb with different meanings. They also have different roles in sentences (i.e. *watch* as a noun can be a subject or an object in a sentence, whereas *watch* as a verb can only be a verb).

Some words undergo changes when they are converted from one part of speech to another. Such changes are often changes of suffixes. For example, *difficult* is an adjective, and addition of *-ly* suffix converses it into *difficultly*, which is an adverb; said adjective can also become a noun, *difficulty*, by adding a *-y* suffix.

Conversion of Part of Speech

English words with different parts of speech may undergo slight changes in spelling, but the same concept does not exist in Chinese, and so some Hong Kong people may not be aware of the parts of speech of a number of words, resulting in adjectives being used as nouns etc. Nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs seem to be equally vulnerable to this type of conversion, but no specific words which are very frequently involved can be found.

They should reconsider about their goal and halt to be materialism.

(A1)

I believe that peer influence is the most vital part for the teenage to be good or bad.

(A11)

Cultural development-wise, it is universal acknowledged that Hong Kong is regarded as tourist destination, because of its unique local culture.

(A14)

Meanwhile, youtuber is enable to benefit from the profit sharing scheme so that they can make money from the advertising avenue.

(A13)

Conversion of parts of speech for verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs are also reported in studies by Chan (1987), Chu (1987), Chu (2005), Fong (1987), Jim (2005) and Paskewitz (1999). Chan (1987) and Chu (2005) report that students often do not know which parts of speech a word belongs to, even though they do not find it difficult to understand the concept of parts of speech.

4.3.6.2 Capital Letters

In Standard English, capital letters are required for the following cases.

(1) initial alphabet of the first letter in a sentence

(2) initial alphabet of specific names of person, title, company and country/region etc.

(3) initials of abbreviations (e.g. BBC and CIA)

(4) pronoun *I*

(5) initial alphabet of specific days, months, events and festivals

Addition of Capital Letter

In WLHKE, some words which do not require capital letters, however, may be subject to addition of capital letters in Hong Kong Chinese people's writing. It is likely to be overgeneralization, as capital letters are applied to words which do not require them.

With the help from the related News articles on the consequences of the addiction issues, it is convincing for students to have high awareness of it.

(A10)

Thus, I suggest some solutions to help these children who are in Secondary School.

(A11)

In the first place, Smartphone has its function to bring more convenience, that device enables people to make their works efficiently and practically;

(A15)

Omission of Capital Letter

In WLHKE, some words referring to specific names, places and so forth lack capital letter for their initial alphabet.

Students may perform cantonese drama, singing to play up to elder.

(A2)

Afterwards, the effect far exceeded her expectation, because it became an instant hit on the internet.

In addition to encouraging students to make their own video on youtube, this article aims to explain its obvious benefits.

(A13)

4.3.6.3 Word Collocation

In Standard English, word collocation is combination of a pair or group of words which are habitually or customarily placed together by native speakers (Walsh, 2005). Examples include *key issues*, *pose a problem*, *sense of pride*, *swelling with pride* and so forth.

Localized Phrases and Word Collocations

Localized phrases and word collocations refer to unique combinations of words and the creation of phrases which are not common in native English writing and speaking. Again, Hong Kong Chinese people with relatively lower proficiency of

English may find it difficult to convey certain messages precisely, and so they choose words which they know to bring out the messages.

From the beginning with, the bacco company is one of the main roles for the increasing number of teenagers smoking.

(A17)

[A]ccordingly, people cannot express their discontentment with government regardless of others, so that they have to stick to the manner of legal.

(A12)

Changes of words in fossilized expressions are also reported in studies by Chan (1987), Chu (1987), Chu (2005), Kwan (1997) and Paskewitz (1999). Students tend to translate phrases directly from Cantonese expressions (Chan, 1987; Chu, 2005; Kwan, 1997).

Word Replacement

Word replacement is defined as a word being replaced by another word which has a different meaning. In this case, the parts of speech of the replaced and replacing words are not always the same. Probably due to limited vocabulary acquired, some Hong Kong people do not have a sufficiently wide range of (word choices) lexicon to express certain ideas, and so they select some words which, they believe, carry the same or similar meanings. However, in some examples (e.g. A2 and A11), we can also see that the authors are trying to demonstrate their knowledge of synonyms (e.g.

old people in A2 and *children* in A11), but at the end they choose words which do not have exactly the same meanings. In the current analysis, no particular word is found to common replace another.

What the elder most need is concern as well as care.

(A2)

The Monster Parentes are worrying about their son to meet setbacks.

(A11)

Chu (1987) also reports that Hong Kong students use words which cannot express meanings correctly (e.g. *lighting* instead of *lightning*) or precisely (*released the rope* instead of *loosen the rope*). Similar reporting can be found in studies by Chu (2005), Hui (2005), Kwan (1997) and Wong (1985).

Separation of Word

When one word is being split into two or more words, separation of the word occurs. Some Hong Kong people, conscious of the fact that the name of their own city contains two words, believe that Hongkongers should also be written into two words instead of one. The separated form of this word can be found in two articles. Words with a hyphen between the two morphemes also tend to separate from each other as the authors omit the required hyphen.

Indeed, Hong Kongers constantly take to the streets to express discontentment with the government and legislature.

The Chinese government set a so called 'nominating committee' to screen out candidates, who are pan-democrats.

(A12)

Hong Kong is part of China, and the majority of Hong Konger is Chinese so that Hong Kong retains Chinese traditions and confucianism.

(A14)

4.3.7 Summary

As can be seen from the above, there are a large number of localised non-standard forms in WLHKE. Table 4.2 summarises these, with examples to highlight the use.

Groups	Types of Feature	Examples
Article	Omission of Article	The victims do not seek help from <u>police</u> .
	Change of Article	Each class works as a team to perform <u>an</u> short stories about Internet addiction will be dedicated to the whole school on the hall stage.
	Addition of Article	In addition, one of the major reasons for owning a smartphone is <u>the</u> entertainment.

Nouns	Context-based Omission of Subject	As you can see teenagers are the future of the society. We have a responsibility to stop it and leading them to a healthy life. It is no choice that only if above all actions are done <u>can reduce teenage smoking</u> .
	Addition of Plural Marker	My friend, who is named Sammi, has been interested in debating for a <u>periods</u> of time.
	Omission of Plural Marker	Hong Kong is part of China, and the majority of <u>Hong Konger</u> is Chinese so that Hong Kong retains Chinese traditions and confucianism.
	Lack of Agreement between Noun-Pronoun	Moreover, if people can cultivate a habit of using bicycle for travelling, they can do exercise regularly, which in turn helps <u>them build a strong body</u> , and it therefore prevents them from getting ill easily.
Preposition and Prepositional Phrases	Preposition Replacement	In conclusion, <u>from</u> certain extents, exams and test are barriers in learning, it gives too much pressure on students and emotional problems and students may lose their self esteem.
Sentence Structures	Inversion of Sentence Patterns	<u>Why this situation happened in our society?</u>
	Fragmentized Sentence	<u>Including have a emotion swings ,depressionand even suicide.</u>

	Sentence-end Tag	This place has its characteristics and culture, <u>and hence flourishing</u> .
	Conjunction Formation	<u>Even</u> they wish to do so, the abusers will threaten them to not contact with others.
	Omission of Conjunction	An old saying goes, ‘Rome was not built in a day’, <u>education is crucial for our upcoming society</u> .
	Omission of Comma before Conjunction	No one wish to be abused by beloved one <u>so</u> all of us have to do something to ameliorate the circumstance.
	Addition of Preposition before Relative Pronouns	Thus, in this article I would like to discuss this issue in detail, <u>for which</u> has an escalating trend of the teenage smoking nowadays...
Verbs	Addition of Preposition for Verb	When the teacher are required to <u>teach for</u> fewer students, spare time is squeezed out and used to instill additional wisdom such as Confucianism.
	Overgeneralization of Use of Modal Verb	For long term speaking, our society can still be benefited from aforementioned policy... Not only <u>could</u> the society be benefitted, but also our students are.
	Simplification of Tense	But in recent years, smoking <u>is</u> becoming just as popular, especially for the junior secondary

		students.
Addition of Third Person Singular Suffix		In addition to encouraging students to make their own video on youtube, this article aims to <u>explains</u> its obvious benefits.
Omission of Third Person Singular Suffix		Because every student <u>want</u> to pass their exams with flying colors.
Omission of Participle Suffix		Hence, I decide to hold two activities , <u>call</u> “Red Packet to elder” and “CP of CNY” which means Celebration Party of Chinese New Year for elder.
Addition of Participle Suffix		They can let you avoid to speak ,so your family members will not hear what you <u>said</u> on phone.
Agreement Variation for Be		According to a research done by the Chinese University of Hong Kong, every <u>1</u> in 1425 people <u>were</u> not satisfied with their housing.
Emphatic Be and Shift to Passive Voice		However, teenagers <u>are</u> still <u>have</u> a chance received the information of the bacco.
Bare Infinitive Formation		On the other hand, exams will lead labeling effects <u>occur</u> .
Gerund-infinitives Conversion		We have a responsibility to stop it and <u>leading</u> them to a healthy life.
Gerund Formation		Therefore, government should have a better

		<u>planning</u> and redevelop the old areas to build more houses for Hong Kong.
Vocabulary	Conversion of Part of Speech	Meanwhile, youtuber is <u>enable</u> to benefit from the profit sharing scheme so that they can make money from the advertising avenue.
	Addition of Capital Letter	Thus, I suggest some solutions to help these children who are in <u>Secondary School</u> .
	Omission of Capital Letter	Students may perform <u>cantonese</u> drama, singing to play up to elder.
	Localized Phrases and Word Collocations	Syllabus is set for students to know what they will learn after <u>going to the lessons</u> .
	Word Replacement	We often ignore our own <u>elder</u> in busy country.
	Separation of Word	Indeed, <u>Hong Kongers</u> constantly take to the streets to express discontentment with the government and legislature.

Table 4.2: Localized Features of WLHKE with Examples

As can be seen from the list, localized features of WLHKE can be found at the morphological, lexical and syntactic levels. Many of these features of WLHKE are also recorded in previous studies taking the approach of EA, though labelled in other fashions. A number of observations can be gleaned from this descriptive analysis.

In my list, 8⁴ (24.2%) out of 33 features probably arise from L1 interference; 9⁵ (27.3%) of these features arise from overgeneralization; the causes of the rest (48.5%) of the features are not entirely certain.

Below is a table comparing the features of all three varieties of HKE, namely WLHKE (largely based on my own results), CHKE (largely based on the results from Poon, 2010) and SHKE (largely based on Paskewitz, 1991).

Groups	Types of Feature	WLHKE	CHKE	SHKE
Article	Omission of Article	✓	✓	✓
	Change of Article	✓		✓
	Addition of Article	✓		✓
Nouns	Context-based Omission of Subject	✓	✓	
	Addition of Plural Marker	✓		✓
	Omission of Plural Marker	✓	✓	✓
	Lack of Agreement between Noun-Pronoun	✓		✓
Preposition and Prepositional	Preposition Replacement	✓	✓	✓

⁴ These features are: *omission of article, context-based omission of subject, omission of plural marker, inversion of sentence patterns, fragmentized sentence, omission of conjunction, omission of third person singular suffix and omission of participle suffix.*

⁵ These features include: *addition of -ed/ing suffix, addition of article, addition of plural marker, addition of preposition before relative pronoun, overgeneralization of use of modal verb, addition of third person singular suffix, addition of participle suffix, and addition of capital letters.*

Phrases				
Sentence Structures	Inversion of Sentence	✓		✓
	Patterns			
	Fragmentized Sentence	✓		
	Sentence-end Tag	✓		
	Conjunction Formation	✓		
	Omission of Conjunction	✓		
	Omission of Comma before Conjunction	✓		
	Addition of Preposition before Relative Pronouns	✓		
Verbs	End-of-sentence particles in Romanised form		✓	
	Addition of Preposition for Verb	✓		
	Overgeneralization of Use of Modal Verb	✓		✓
	Simplification of Tense	✓		
	Addition of Third Person	✓		

	Singular Suffix			
	Omission of Third Person Singular Suffix	✓		
	Omission of Participle Suffix	✓	✓	✓
	Addition of Participle Suffix	✓		
	Agreement Variation for Be	✓		✓
	Emphatic <i>Be</i> and Shift to Passive Voice	✓		✓
	Omission of <i>Be</i> as Linking Verb			✓
	Omission of <i>Be</i> for Passive Voice			✓
	Bare Infinitive Formation	✓		
	Gerund-infinitives Conversion	✓		
	Gerund Formation	✓		
Vocabulary	Conversion of Part of Speech	✓		✓

	Addition of Capital Letter	✓		
	Omission of Capital Letter	✓	✓	
	Localized Phrases and Word Collocations	✓	✓	✓
	Word Replacement	✓		✓
	Separation of Word	✓		
	Use of Shortenings		✓	
	Redundant Words and Phrases			✓
Negation	Double Negatives			✓
	Negation Replacement			✓

Table 4.3: Comparison of Localized Features of WLHKE, CHKE and SHKE

Table 4.3 shows that some of the features in WLHKE can also be found in SHKE. For example, both WLHKE and SHKE share features such as addition and omission of plural marking, addition and omission of articles, different usages of prepositions and modal verbs, conversion of parts of speech, and so forth. A number of features, such as double negatives, redundant words and phrases, omission of *be* as linking verbs and for passive voice, are found in Paskewitz's (1991) research but not in my data. However, since only 20 articles are included in my current qualitative analysis, the features absent in my result may be present in other articles. Therefore, we cannot

hastily jump to the conclusion that WLHKE does not have those several features found in SHKE. Nevertheless, Paskewitz finds that in general, oral errors are more common than written errors, probably because oral texts are synchronous, as students cannot monitor their speech as they do in formal writing.

Note that very few studies are carried out to provide a full list of features of CHKE, and so the features of CHKE as shown in the list may appear fewer in number. Nonetheless, a number of features in WLHKE are also recorded in CHKE, such as localized vocabulary, different usages of articles, prepositions, relative clauses and so forth. As reported by Poon (2010) and shown in Table 4.2, some features are likely to be exclusive to CHKE, such as use of shortenings and end-of-sentence particles in Romanised form.

The results as shown in the above table fail to conclude the degree of similarity between WLHKE, CHKE and SHKE satisfactorily. Details of the linguistic features generated by the users in their texts and speeches are required.

5 A Case Study of Plural Marking in Written Learner Hong Kong English

The above section, which investigates the grammatical features of WLHKE, also revealed that one of its localized features is the omission of the plural marker, as in example (1).

- (1) It is hoped that government can take action to prevent more and more *student* from being cheated.

As shown in Appendix 2.2, the frequency of this variable (accounting for 72 out of 420 errors), and the fact that all the 13 writers use the localized form, makes it an ideal candidate for more in-depth analysis. While this variation may simply be put down to an error, closer analysis may reveal patterns of use across a number of social and linguistic factors. Moreover, plural marking, in both written and spoken texts, has been studied by scholars (see Budge, 1989; Law, 2012 and Young, 1991 for example) investigating Hong Kong and Chinese people's English usage. However, some of these studies focus on SHKE (e.g. Budge, 1989) and Chinese English (e.g. Young, 1991) instead of WLHKE, whereas Law's (2012) research has not provided sufficient information on the linguistic factors behind the production of standard and non-standard plural marking in WLHKE. Therefore, in this section, I will investigate the variation of (non-)standard plural marking in WLHKE, as well as the possible linguistic factors which give rise to the variation.

The aim of this part of analysis is to describe and compare the occurrence of both standard and non-standard variants of the plural marker in Hong Kong students' English writing. I will carry out this case study in order to investigate the frequency of

omission of plural markers, as well as the presence of any systematic pattern of how Hong Kong people omit plurality for plural count nouns. Significant factors contributing to this linguistic feature will also be explored.

5.1 Grammatical Number of English and Chinese

Before moving on to the methods of my analysis, I will briefly discuss three possible influences for the omission of plural marker produced by Hong Kong people. These possible influences are: (1) the grammatical number of both English and Chinese languages; (2) Hong Kong people's acquisition of English and first language interference; (3) finally I will consider previous research on omission of plural markers, both as a feature of HKE and as an error committed by Hong Kong people.

English and Chinese belong to different types of languages in linguistic typology, the former language being a member of the group of synthetic languages, the latter a member of the group of analytic languages (Eifring and Theil, 2005). Therefore, linguistic structure and features, such as grammatical number, of these two languages are realized in different ways.

5.1.1 Grammatical Number in English

English, as a synthetic language, relies on inflections to express syntactic relations within sentences. Inflection refers to the variation of the forms of words, which are required to undergo corresponding changes in order to fit the grammatical contexts, such as tense, voice, number, and so forth.

When it comes to inflections for plural nouns, plural suffixes are, in most cases, required in English. The majority of the time / Generally, these plural nouns are marked with *-s*. However, not all nouns in English need plural suffixes. Nouns, which serve as the references of people, objects, ideas, and so on, can be classified into count nouns and non-count nouns. Count nouns are those which can be thought of as separate entities, and so they can exist in both singular and plural forms according to different contexts. Those nouns which cannot be considered as separate entities are non-count nouns. Since my current analysis deals with plural suffixes, in this section only count nouns will be discussed.

Most count nouns need suffixes to indicate plurality when they appear in plural form. These suffixes are commonly known as plural markers. Examples (2) to (4) demonstrate the realization of the most common form of all plural suffixes in English.

(2) Then, their addiction to *phones* won't be so severe.

(3) It is not difficult to figure out the *reasons* deep down

(4) Other than that, the education system doesn't encourage *students* to pursue the creative subjects anymore.

A number of exceptions exist in English, as a small number of plural count nouns take other suffixes, such as those in *children*, *sheep* and so forth, but they will not be discussed or investigated in my research, because of their small number and low frequency of occurrence in my data. Therefore, in this research, I will only focus on the regular marking, *-(e)s*.

5.1.2 Grammatical Number in Chinese

In analytic languages, such as Chinese, be it Cantonese or Mandarin, plurality is not realized by attaching inflectional morphemes, as it is to be understood by modifiers and contexts. In the following two examples (5 & 6), note that the word *student* in Chinese remains the same; in other words, when in plural form, the word lacks a plural marker, and this does not affect the audience's understanding because the preceding modifier *three* has indicated the number already.

(5) 我 是 一 個 學生。

Literal: I be (am) one (a) *quantifier* student.

Translation: I am a student.

(6) 我 有 三 個 學生。

Literal: I have three *quantifier* students.

Translation: I have three students.

When no plurality-indicating modifier can be found, as in example (7), only context or background knowledge can reveal the singularity or plurality of the target nouns.

(7) 我 會 探訪 我的 學生。

Literal: I will visit my student(s).

Translation: I will call my student(s).

In example (7), no linguistic hint is available for deciding the grammatical

number of *student*, so the plurality of the noun must be understood with the help of context or background knowledge. Therefore, both singular and plural forms for the word *student* can be potentially correct without any given context.

5.2 Native Language Interference

A large amount of previous research (Budge, 1989; Chu, 1987; Chu, 2005; Hui, 2005; Kwan, 1997; Law, 2012; Wong, 1985) has investigated Hong Kong students' mastery of English plurality in written texts. It is strongly believed that L1 interference plays a major role. Due to the difference of realization of plurality between Chinese and English, some Hong Kong students learning English face difficulty in mastering plurality of the latter language. Omitting plural markers for count nouns in Hong Kong students' English writing is therefore predictably one of the commonest features shared by many students.

5.3 Previous Research on Hong Kong Students' Learning of English Plurality

Hong Kong students' difficulty in mastering English plurality has received attention from scholars, and research interest is not confined merely to native language interference. Previous studies (Budges, 1989; Law, 2012; Young, 1991) have also explored the significance of linguistic constraints over Hong Kong students' usages of standard and non-standard variants. Accordingly, linguistic elements such as pre-modifiers remind Hong Kong students of the necessity of attaching plural markers

to plural count nouns (details in Section 5.5.1.2). Although Budge and Young's studies are based on spoken English, the linguistic constraints they investigate are worth considering in my current analysis of WLHKE.

5.3.1 Budge's Research on Plurality in Hong Kong Chinese People's Spoken English

Investigating the uses of plurality in spoken English by 80 Hong Kong Chinese people, Budge's (1989) research compares the omission of plural markers in three conditions, which are:

1. Nouns which are preceded by pre-modifiers which do not indicate plurality (for example, *other*, *certain*, etc.)
2. Nouns which are preceded by pre-modifiers which indicate plurality (e.g. *a range of*, *one of the*, *all the*, *more* etc.)
3. Nouns which are preceded by *some* and *any*, as these two words can mean "some and other" or "exceptional" (as shown in Budge's example: He is some piano player). In this case, nouns following these two words do not need a plural marker.

Over 80% of speakers in Budge's research pluralize count nouns in condition 2 more often than in condition 1; 73% of her speakers pluralize count nouns in condition 2 more often than in condition 3. In other words, plurality-indicating pre-modifiers, as listed in condition 2 above, remind Hong Kong people of the necessity of attaching plural *-s* for the count nouns.

5.3.2 Young's Research on Plurality in Chinese People's Spoken English

Young's (1991) research investigates the uses of plurality in spoken English by 12 Chinese subjects, who are learning English as a second language. Note that the subjects in Young's research are Chinese with their mother tongues unspecified. Nonetheless, usage of plurality in Cantonese (mother tongue of the majority of Hong Kong Chinese) is the same as that in Mandarin and many other Chinese dialects, and so I consider Young's research results worth consideration in my current analysis.

In Young's research, two interviews are conducted for each of the 12 subjects, who are divided into two groups based on their English proficiency according to their test scores of a standard English language test. Young also sets a number of hypotheses, some of which are of interest to my current study and hence listed below:

1. Informants with high proficiency will mark plural –s more frequently than those with lower proficiency.
2. The pattern of factors leading to variation among highly proficient informants is different from that among less proficient informants.
3. Definite nouns are more frequently marked with a plural marker than indefinite nouns.
4. Animate nouns are more frequently marked with a plural marker than inanimate nouns.
5. Plural count nouns serving as prenominal modifiers in a complex noun

phrase are more frequently marked with a plural marker than those serving as the head of the noun phrases.

6. Plural count nouns serving as subjects are more frequently marked with a plural marker than those serving as objects, complements and adverbials.
7. Plural marking is inhibited by numerals, partitives, quantifiers and plural demonstratives.
8. Plural marking is marked more often when followed by third person singular present tense than other tenses which do not have any inflection.
9. Plural marking is less frequent when preceded by *there are/were* than by *there is/was*.

Young finds that overall the subjects are able to pluralize 65% of the count nouns.

Individual variation is observed. The overall pattern indicates that the subjects who have higher proficiency tend to correctly pluralize count nouns more often than those who are less proficient in English.

Moreover, the pattern of variation differs between the groups of informants according to their proficiency. For example, definite noun phrases and animacy of nouns favour plural marking among proficient speakers, but no observation can be found regarding those who are less proficient in English.

Prenominal modifiers are also reported to strongly favour plural marking, but Young admits that it is difficult to distinguish plural and genitive *-s* in the data.

Numerals, partitives, quantifiers and plural demonstratives are found to favour plural marking, according to the same research.

Young also finds that subjects do not favour plural marking as strongly as adverbials. When carrying out in-depth investigation, he finds that many nouns in the adverbials belong to measure expressions, which are preceded by numerals. Therefore, it is likely that numerals may also play a role in the higher pluralization rate of adverbials.

5.3.3 Law's Research on Plurality in Hong Kong Students' Written English

Law's recent study (2012) on Hong Kong students' learning of English plurality in written texts demonstrates that students are capable of correctly realizing plurality of more than 80% of count nouns in English writing.

The written data in Law's study were collected from students in a local school in Hong Kong. 58 pieces of writing were obtained from the group of S1 students (aged 12-13), while 20 pieces of writing came from the group of S5 students (aged 16-17).

Note that Law considers students' correct pluralization of both count nouns and mass nouns when calculating rates of acquisition of plurals.

Said study reveals that S5 and S1 students correctly pluralize 84.3% and 82.2% of the count nouns respectively. The study also reveals that the presence/absence of prenominal modifiers (i.e. non-plurality-indicating modifiers) is not an important factor in students' production of plural marking. However, Law admits that the

amount of data is small, and so is the number of topics covered in the data; all participants in her study come from one school in Hong Kong. As Law finds her data and subjects not representative enough, my current analysis will test the result of her study.

5.4 Method

5.4.1 Collection of Articles

In total, 486 articles were collected from the website of Little Soldier Forum and in total there are over 230,000 words.

5.4.2 Word List

Count nouns are an open class of words with a potentially infinite number of different types. For this reason, I chose to include in the study the most frequently occurring count nouns in the data, rather than attempt to provide an exhaustive list which may run into thousands. Therefore, a word list is required for identifying common words in Hong Kong students' articles.

5.4.3 Selection of Words

With AntConc, a word list was generated, consisting of the frequency of occurrence of all the words in the articles. From this word list, count nouns which appear 75 times or more were picked for quantitative analysis. Less frequently found

nouns are not included for practical reasons as stated above.

5.4.4 Coding Data

After the selection of target nouns from the word list, a mega-file was created. The mega-file is a txt file containing the sentences in which the target nouns are found. Data in this mega-file were coded. Details of what were encoded will be provided in the next section.

5.5 Analysis

5.5.1 Consideration of Factors

Previous research suggests a number of possible conditioning factors on plural marking. I shall discuss these in detail below.

5.5.1.1 Lexical Items

Individual Lexical Items

Individual lexical items are considered one of the linguistic factors which may have an influence on linguistic variation (Poplack and Tagliamonte, 1994), and the same is expected in the context of WLHKE. In other words, some lexical items may condition Hong Kong students' uses of standard and non-standard plural marking in formal English writing.

Previous studies on HKE have not carried out any investigation of how production of non-standard plural marking may be constrained by individual lexical items. At the same time, although several nativized varieties of English, such as Singaporean English (Leimgruber, 2009), also display omission of plural markers, these varieties lack in-depth investigation on linguistic constraints over speakers' usages of standard and non-standard variants.

Animacy of Nouns

Previous research has also shown that animacy of nouns may further play a part in influencing variation.

Animacy is found to condition plural marking in TokPisin, according to Mühlhäusler's (1981) research. The speakers of this variety tend to produce standard plural marking in the presence of animate nouns.

Young's study (1991) also finds that plural markers are more frequently attached to animate plural nouns among those who have high English proficiency, whereas non-standard plural markers are favoured among the Chinese with lower English level.

My study will consider whether animacy is one of the significant factors over omission of plural markers.

5.5.1.2 Pre-modifiers and Plurality

Pre-modification is shown to have a significant effect on plural marking. For

example, it is reported that in AAVE, the presence of certain pre-modifiers, such as numerals, tend to induce speakers to omit plural markers, probably because speakers expect listeners to be aware of plurality given that numerals have been explicitly expressed (see Dillard, 1972 for example).

In the context of HKE, numerals may have a different impact on the use of plural markers. The presence of these pre-modifiers is reported to serve as a reminder to Hong Kong students (Budge, 1989). The presence of plurality-indicating pre-modifiers (e.g. *many*, *few*) can remind Hong Kong people of the necessity of attaching plural markers for plural count nouns when they are speaking English.

However, as reported by Young (1991) and Setter et al. (2010 p.45-48), Chinese people sometimes omit plural marker for count nouns despite the fact that the preceding pre-modifiers clearly indicate plurality. In other words, they attach suffixes to count nouns inconsistently in spite of the presence of pre-modifiers. Young's study also points out that different types of pre-modifiers have different influences on his Chinese subjects of different English proficiencies.

The abovementioned studies focus on the speech acts of Hong Kong people. When it comes to written texts, presence of plurality-indicating pre-modifiers seems to have lost its significance. In her study on Hong Kong students' acquisition of English plurality, Law (2012) finds that pre-modifiers are not likely to be a significant factor in the omission of the plural marker. However, as mentioned, Law admits that her study, based on a small amount of data, may not prove representative enough. One can therefore argue that it remains unclear whether the presence of pre-modifiers is a significant factor, at least in the context of Hong Kong people's formal English writing.

My following analysis will therefore take pre-modifiers into account. I will investigate nouns which are preceded by plurality-indicating (e.g. *many*, *few*) or non-plurality-indicating (e.g. *important*, *popular*, *their*) pre-modifiers, or without any pre-modifier.

5.5.1.3 Individual Contributors

Previous research shows that individual variation can influence variation at phonological (see for example of African American accents in Kendall, 2010), morphological (see for example of third person singular present suffix *-s*, possessive *-s* and so forth in AAVE in Ezgeta, 2012; also see example of Chinese English in Young, 1991), and lexical (see for example of AAVE in Labov et al., 1968; Wolfram, 1969) levels. Results in these studies show that individual speakers vary greatly in language production.

Previous research on HKE lacks detailed investigation into individual variation, but, as can be seen in the above paragraphs, a large number of studies on other variables demonstrate that individual variation plays a key role in the production of standard and non-standard features. Therefore, the current analysis will look into the individual performance and study how each contributor produces standard and non-standard plural marking.

5.5.1.4 Numbers of Articles

Numbers of essays submitted, instead of the writers' proficiency of English, is

chosen as one independent variable in my study. Young's (1991) study discovers that the higher the proficiency of a speaker is, the less likely it is for the speaker to omit plural markers in his or her speech. Although English proficiency of the writers in my research cannot be objectively assessed, I classify the writers into different groups according to the number of articles they contribute.

In general, it remains, at least in the case of Hong Kong, unclear whether having more writing practices can help EFL learners improve their English proficiency. However, some scholars such as Braine and McNaught (2007) suggest that more writing practice is required for EFL students who want to master English. Similarly, a Vietnamese study (Tuan, 2010) finds that students who participate in weekly journal writing commit fewer mistakes after 13 weeks. Therefore, it is possible that Hong Kong students who practice English writing more often produce fewer non-standard forms in general.

Given that the background of each writer cannot be known, we do know that they all come from different schools and that they may receive different kinds of training, and so it remains difficult to assess their performance based on their learning methods. Nonetheless, the imbalance, as shown in the numbers of articles written by students, may have significance for the students' uses of standard and non-standard variants.

5.5.2 Circumscription of the Variable Context

5.5.2.1 Mutated Plurals

Nouns with mutant plural marking are also excluded, so that I can concentrate on

the –s suffix, which is the commonest plural suffix in English. Excluded nouns with mutant plural suffixes are shown below.

First, parents should take care of their children occasionally.

[I]n fact, it is not an uncommon phenomenon among the young people in Hong Kong.

5.5.2.2 Uncountable Nouns

Uncountable nouns do not require a plural suffix in any context in Standard English, and so these nouns are not part of my research. Therefore, uncountable nouns as shown below are excluded.

Ben was determined to change their life through education,...

Tom spat out the words with his utmost effort.

Even when I could approach her successfully, she was moody most of the time, blaming herself and the environment.

5.5.3 Coding System

This section discusses the coding instruction for omission of plural markers. Below are details of how I code each variable.

Factor 1: Varieties of English

The first dependent variable will decide whether the target nouns comply with the rules of Standard English or that of HKE. Below are two examples in which the target noun is *student*; example (12) contains the standard form, while example (13) contains a non-standard variant.

(12) So not all the students can do exercise in their home,...

(13) Some student in which sharing their locker might copy the locker key so that they can open the locker liberally.

Factor 2: Lexical Items

Recall Section 5.5.1.1, where I discussed previous research on individual lexical items as one of the significant factors in the omission of plural marking in Chinese speakers' spoken texts (Young, 1991), as well as that of native varieties of English, such as AAVE (Ezgeta, 2012; Labov et al., 1968; Wolfram, 1969). Below are some examples of commonly found individual lexical items, and the examples show the words in non-standard plural form.

(14) Yet teachers told me to join different activity to wide my thought.

(15) If the problem are more serious, some people may even have a obsessive compulsory disorder.

(16) I was in charge of contacting with other school when I was a member of student union.

(17) At first, teachers can use to many funny medicum or way to teach them knowledge,...

Factor 3: Noun Group

Recall Section 5.5.1.1, where I mentioned the division of nouns into animate and inanimate groups in Young's (1991) research. This factor group will categorize tokens into the two groups according to the nature of nouns (e.g. *students* and *pets* are animate nouns, whereas *countries* and *smartphones* are inanimate nouns)

Factor 4: Pre-modifiers

Recall Section 5.5.1.2, where I discussed previous research on pre-modifiers as one of the significant factors in the omission of plural marking in Hong Kong students' writing (Budge, 1989), as well as that of native varieties of English, such as AAVE (Dillard, 1972).

Some plural count nouns without plural markers are preceded by plurality-indicating pre-modifiers. Below are two examples.

(18) The followings are three valid reason for my view.

(19) Moreover, we should educate the public to take care the feeling of 'New Hongkongers', who have lived in Hong Kong a few year,...

Some nouns lacking plural markers are preceded by non-plurality-indicating pre-modifiers, as shown in the examples below.

(20) When the teacher are required to teach for fewer students,...

(21) As a result ,thepet are able to have the better life due to the measure.

Finally, pre-modifiers can be absent, leaving the plural count nouns alone as the subject.

(22) ... but also bad air quality which can enable citizen to get sick easily while they are doing sports outside.

(23) The topic is “Should teenager do part-time jobs”.

(24) Since computers and mobile phone have appeared in this world.

Factor 5: Number of Articles

Recall Section 5.5.1.4, where I discussed previous research on the number of articles written as one of the significant factors in the omission of plural marking in Hong Kong students’ writing (Braine and McNaught, 2007; Young, 1991).

The numbers of articles written by every contributor is recorded, as shown in a list in Appendix 1.2. Therefore, the numbers of articles written by the contributors can be coded according to the identities of these contributors. 52 contributors are coded individually, while the rest are all coded as *Others* (i.e. Z).

Factor 6: Individual Contributor

Recall Section 5.5.1.3, where I discussed previous research on individual variation as a factor governing speakers’ choices of different variables (see Ezgeta, 2012; Kendall, 2010; Labov et al., 1968; Wolfram, 1969 for example).

The individual contributors are recorded; some of the contributors have provided

three or more articles, and so they are given individual codes, whereas those who provide only one to two articles are coded collectively as *Others*.

Summary

In sum, I code for the following factors:

1. Standard English or Hong Kong English
2. Lexical items
3. Animate and inanimate groups
4. Pre-modification
5. Numbers of Articles Contributed
6. Individual Contributor

Appendix 3.2 consists of a table showing the details of the codes and coding contents.

5.5.4 Running Analysis

To generate statistical results of the coded data, the mega-file is uploaded to GoldVarb, which is a variable rule program specialized in quantitative analysis of linguistics (Tagliamonte, 2006 p.129). This software can employ variable rule analysis and calculate significance of different factors.

5.6 Results

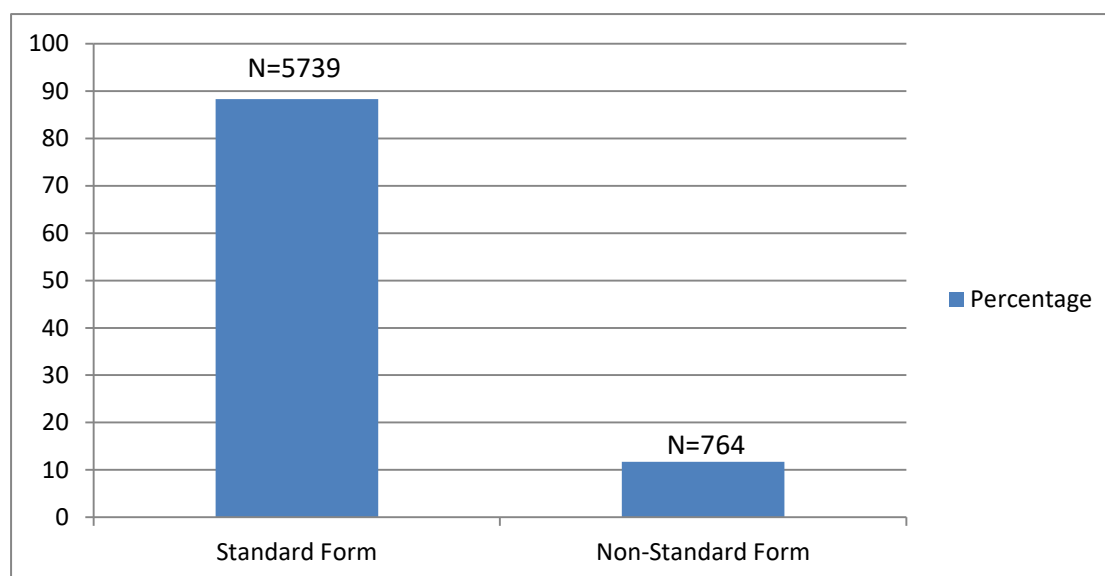
5.6.1 Overall

Out of 6,503 tokens which are count nouns supposed to be in plural form, only 764 of them (11.7%) are unmarked with plural markers, as shown in Table 5.1.

	Number	Percentage
Plural Count nouns with plural markers	5739	88.3
Plural Count nouns without plural markers	764	11.7
Total	6503	100.0

Table 5.1: Numbers and Percentages of Plurality in WLHKE for All Writers

Graph 5.1 is a chart showing the graphical representation of the result in Table 5.1.

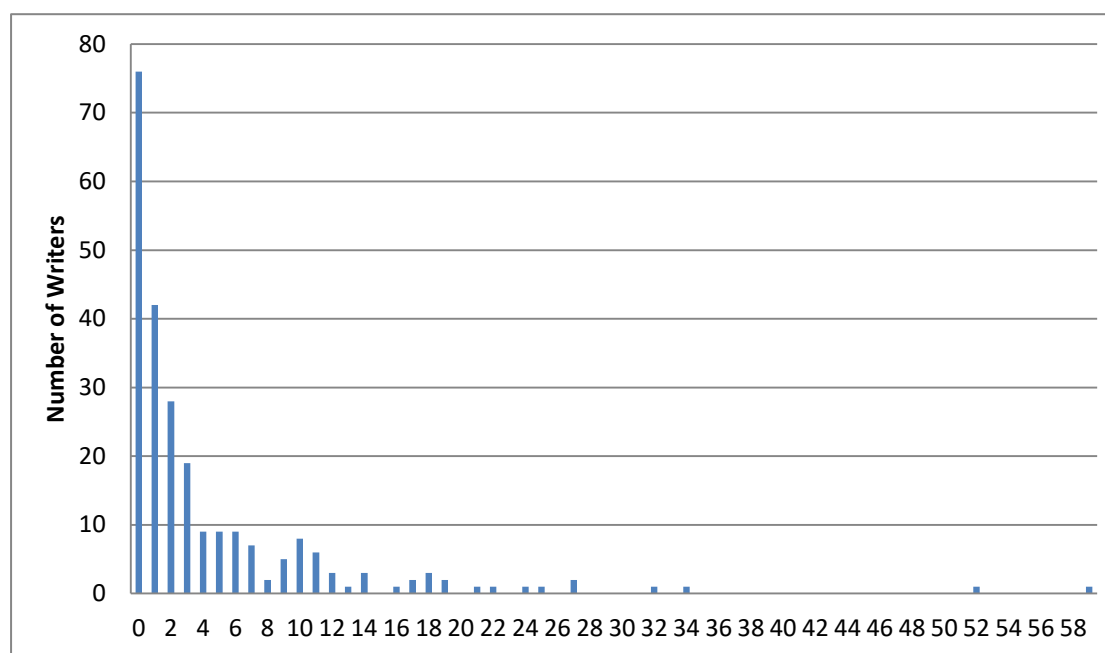


Graph 5.1: Variation of Plural Marking in WLHKE for All Writers

While many previous studies (Budge, 1989; Chu, 1987; Chu, 2005; Hui, 2005; Kwan, 1997; Law, 2012; Wong, 1985) agree that omission of plural marking is a common error found in Hong Kong students' writing, only Law (2012) has carried out quantitative analysis on Hong Kong students' production of non-standard plural marking, which shows that students aged 16 and 12 are able to correctly pluralize 84.3% and 82.2% of the count nouns respectively. The result in my research is similar to that in Law's research, as the percentages of correct pluralization exceed 80%. The higher percentage in my research probably arises from the fact that the contributors in the data, generally, are more proficient in English.

Recall Section 5.5.1.3 which mentions that individual variation is investigated in studies over new varieties of English and learner languages in SLA. Previous studies on HKE have not covered individual variation, and so it remains unanswered whether individual variation plays a key role in Hong Kong students' production of non-standard plural marking. Therefore, a key issue in the analysis of variation is

whether all writers vary. Investigation into the performance of each individual writer reveals some writers do not vary, whereas the others vary to different extents. Graph 5.2 shows the total numbers of students for each number of production of non-standard form.



Graph 5.2: Total Numbers of Students for each Number of Production of
Non-standard Plural Marking

As can be seen in Graph 5.2, 76 (31.0%) out of 245 writers in my sample do not have any instances of non-standard plural marking; 42 (17.1%) of the total produce only one non-standard form; 28 (11.4%) of them produce two non-standard forms; those who produce three non-standard forms account for 7.8% of the total (i.e. 19 writers). As the number of production goes from four and fifty-nine, the number of writers drop to less than 10.

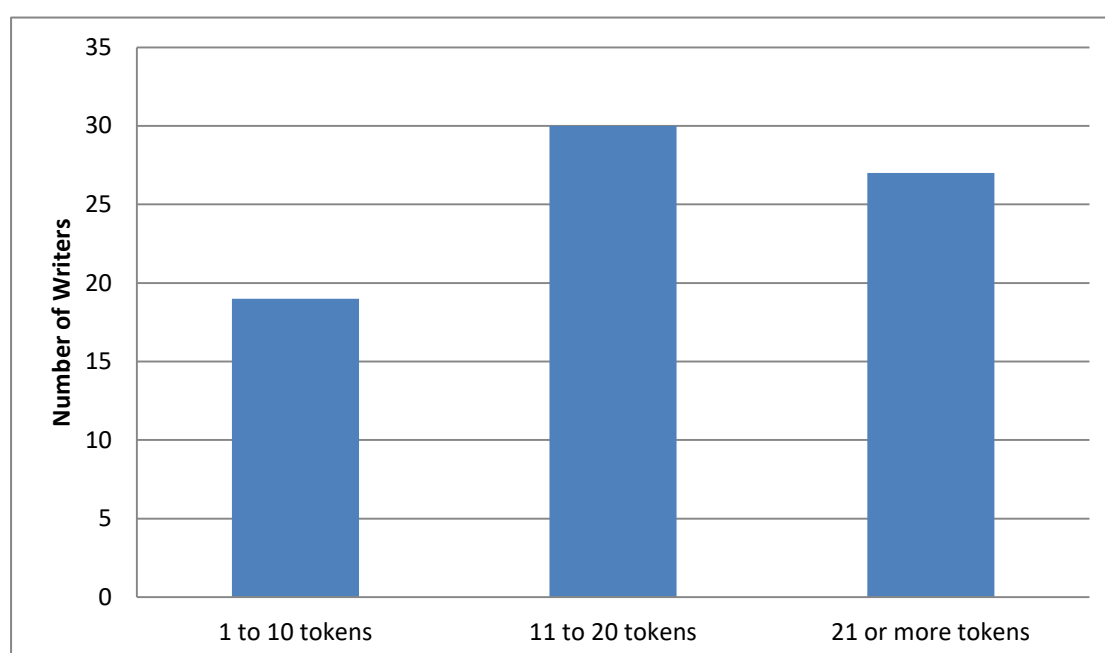
From these data, it can be summarized that 165 (67.3%) out of 245 writers

produce no more than three non-standard forms of plural marking in their English writing. The rest of the writers (32.5%) produce more than three non-standard forms. In other words, it is probable that the majority of the writers do not vary, or they vary to a very small extent. As these writers may skew the data, I will carry out further investigation of the performance of each individual writer.

5.6.2 Individual Writers

5.6.2.1 Categorical Writers

Categorical writers refer to writers who do not produce any non-standard tokens. As can be seen from graph 5.2, 76 (31.0%) out of 245 writers do not produce any non-standard form of plural marking. In some instances, this is because the writer has very few tokens overall. More details of how these writers perform can be seen in Graph 5.3, which shows how many students have contributed certain numbers of tokens.



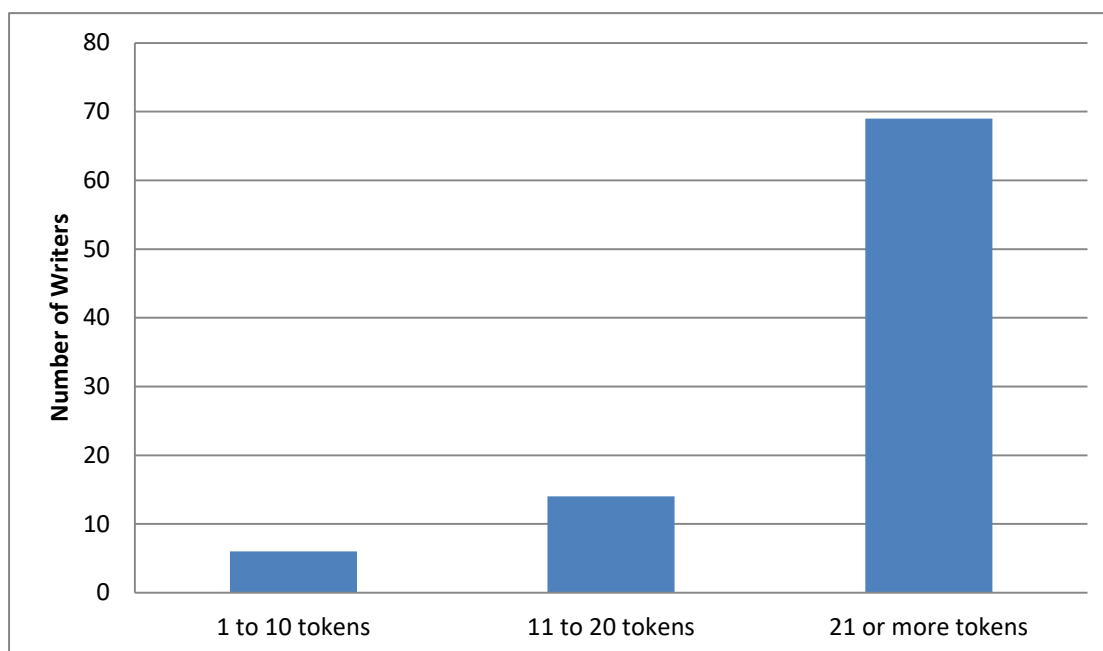
Graph 5.3: Numbers of Categorical Writers Contributing Different Numbers of
Tokens

As shown in Graph 5.3, 19 of them (25.0%) have from 1 to 10 tokens. In fact, 16 (21.1%) out of 20 of these writers contribute less than three articles. Whether these writers have mastered the standard rule of plural marking remains unknown, as there are simply too few tokens for us to build up any argument.

The majority of these categorical writers have over 10 tokens. In fact, over 27 writers (35.5%) have 21 tokens or more. In these cases, we can say quite confidently that these speakers have full control over plural marking in writing. In other words, they have acquired the native rule of plural marking. However, it remains unclear whether these students have acquired the other native rules. Section 5.6.2.4 will address this issue by selecting 5 contributors from each group of authors (i.e. categorical, low-variation and high-variation writers) for further investigation regarding how well they acquired the other native rules of English grammar.

5.6.2.2 Low-Variation Writers

From Graph 5.2, it can be found that 89 (36.2%) out of all of the 245 writers produce 1 to 3 non-standard tokens. Similar to the cases of the categorical writers discussed in the previous section, many of these 89 writers seem to be capable of using plural marking in the correct way, as can be seen in Graph 5.4 below, which show the number of low-variation writers contributing certain numbers of tokens.



Graph 5.4: Numbers of Low-Variation Writers Contributing Different Numbers of Tokens

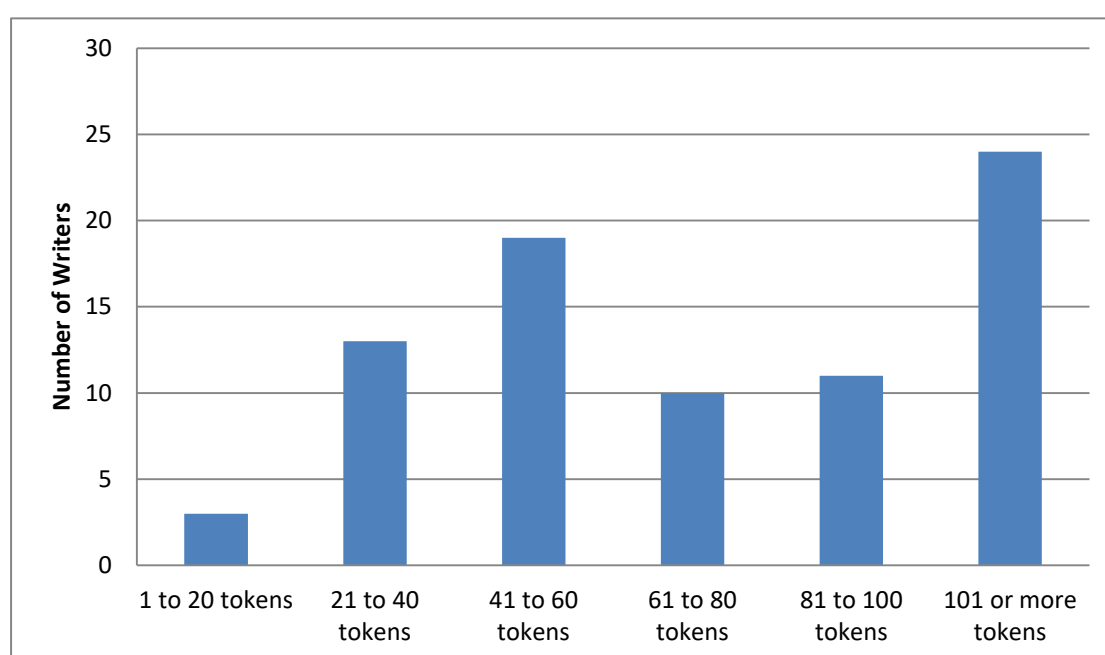
As can be seen in Graph 5.4, 69 out of 89 (i.e. 77.5%) low-variation writers have contributed 21 or more tokens. Among these 69 writers, the rate of omission of plural marking ranges from 1% to 14%. In other words, it can be assumed that a vast majority of these students have acquired near-native rule of plural marking.

When considering the number of articles being written by each writer, it can be found that 60 (87.0%) out of the 69 writers contribute fewer than three articles. Recall section 5.5.1.4 in which I assume that students with higher proficiency tend to write more articles, and thus contributing to a higher number of articles. However, low-variation writers mostly write few articles. It is probable that these writers receive positive comments with their articles, and so they do not find it necessary for them to

spend more time on writing practice.

5.6.2.3 High-Variation Writers

The last group of writers contains 80 students who produce 4 or more⁶ non-standard tokens in their writing, accounting for 32.5% of the total number of writers. Details of how many of these writers produce a certain number of tokens can be seen in Graph 5.5 below.

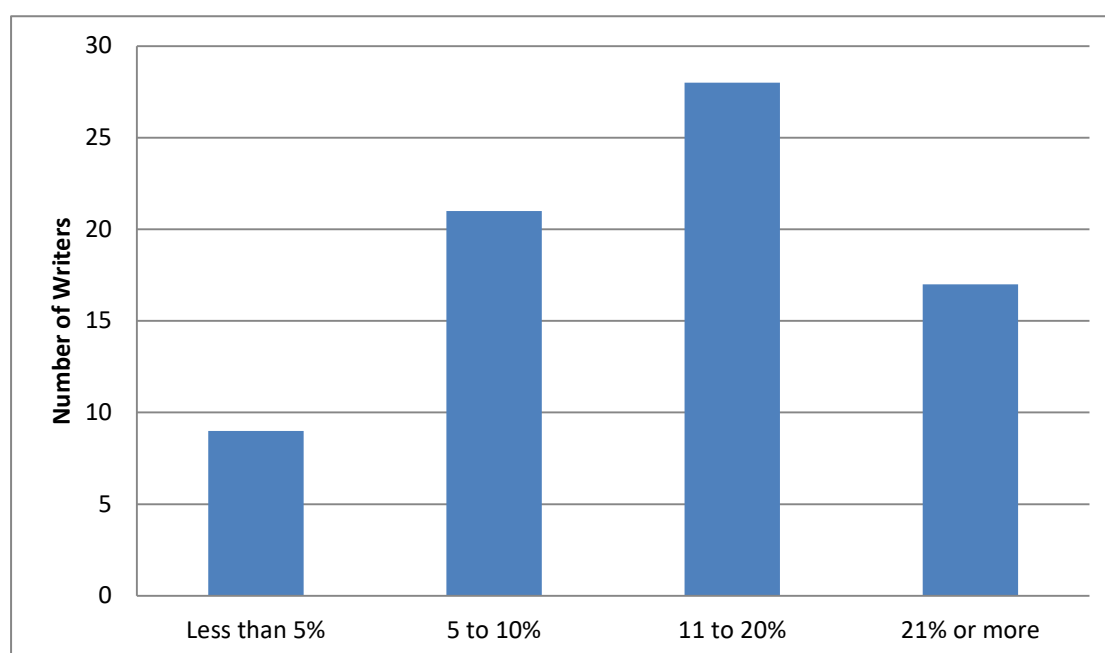


Graph 5.5: Numbers of High-Variation Writers Contributing Different Numbers of Tokens

Graph 5.5 reveals that only 3 (3.8%) out of 80 writers produce fewer than 21

⁶The maximum number of non-standard tokens produced by a writer is 59.

tokens. In other words, the vast majority (96%) of these 80 high-variation writers have contributed sufficient numbers of overall tokens to allow me to further investigate the percentage of how these 77 writers produce the non-standard plural marking, as shown in Graph 5.6 below.



Graph 5.6: Numbers of High-variation Writers Producing Certain Percentage of Non-standard Plural Marking

As seen from Graph 5.6, 68 (88.3%) out of the 77 writers of high-variation writers produce more than 5% non-standard form of plural marker in their essays; 45 (54.8%) of them produce more than 10% of non-standard plural marking. In fact, the range of the rate of omission of plural marking goes from 1% to 87%, and so it indicates that remarkable individual variation can be observed.

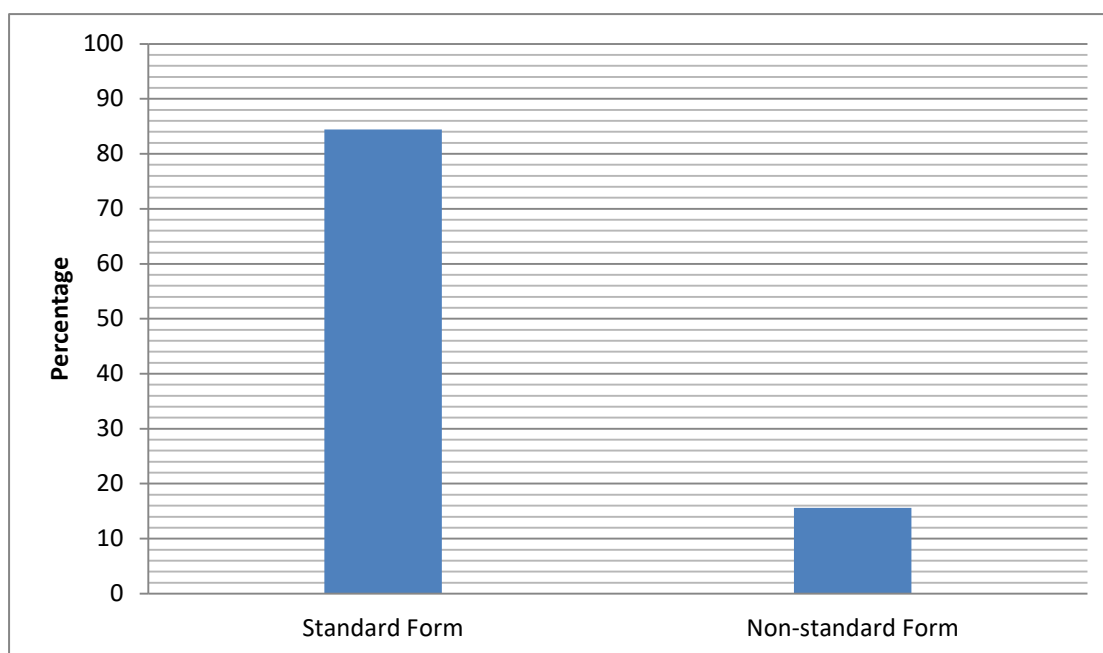
In order to obtain a more in-depth picture of how frequently the high variation

writers produce non-standard plural marking, I removed the categorical and low-variation writers and ran the rest of the data with GoldVarb in the same manner as mentioned in Section 5.6.4. Table 5.2, supported by Graph 5.7, shows the percentage of omission of plural markers among the 77 high-variation writers.

	Number	Percentage
Plural count nouns with plural markers	3566	84.4
Plural count nouns without plural markers	656	15.6
Total	4212	100.0

Table 5.2: Numbers and Percentages of Plurality in WLHKE among the 80
High-variation Writers

Below is the graphic representation of Table 5.2.



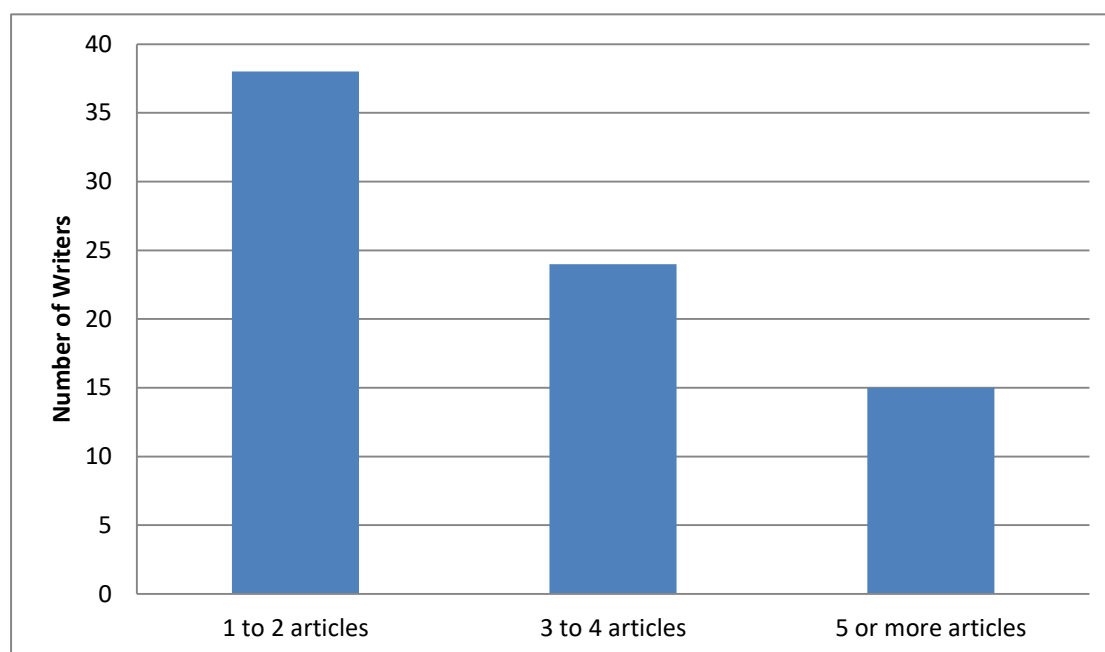
Graph 5.7: Numbers and Percentages of Plurality in WLHKE among High-variation Writers

4212 tokens belong to high-variation writers. Of these tokens, 656 of them are written in non-standard form (15.6%). Not surprisingly, the rate of non-standard plural marking goes up from 11.7%, when all writers are considered, to 15.6% when categorical and low-variation writers are removed. Recall Law's (2012) study which shows that S5 and S1 students (aged 16 and 12 respectively) correctly pluralize 84.3% and 82.2% of the count nouns respectively. High-variation writers in my research can pluralize 84.4% of the count nouns by using the target forms, which is very close to S5 students' level in Law's study.

Moreover, students in my research vary greatly in the production of non-standard plural marking. Law's (2012) study also discovers "individual differences", referring to different rates of acquisition of plurals among students in S5 and S1. Such results

also demonstrate that variation exists among the individual subjects in her study, but Law does not consider individual differences as the major concern. It is only noted in her study that individual differences do not arise from age difference. Regarding this, because the ages of the writers in my analysis are not known, the relationship between individual differences and age difference cannot be investigated.

As for the number of essays contributed by each writer, the graph below shows the number of students contributing different numbers of articles.

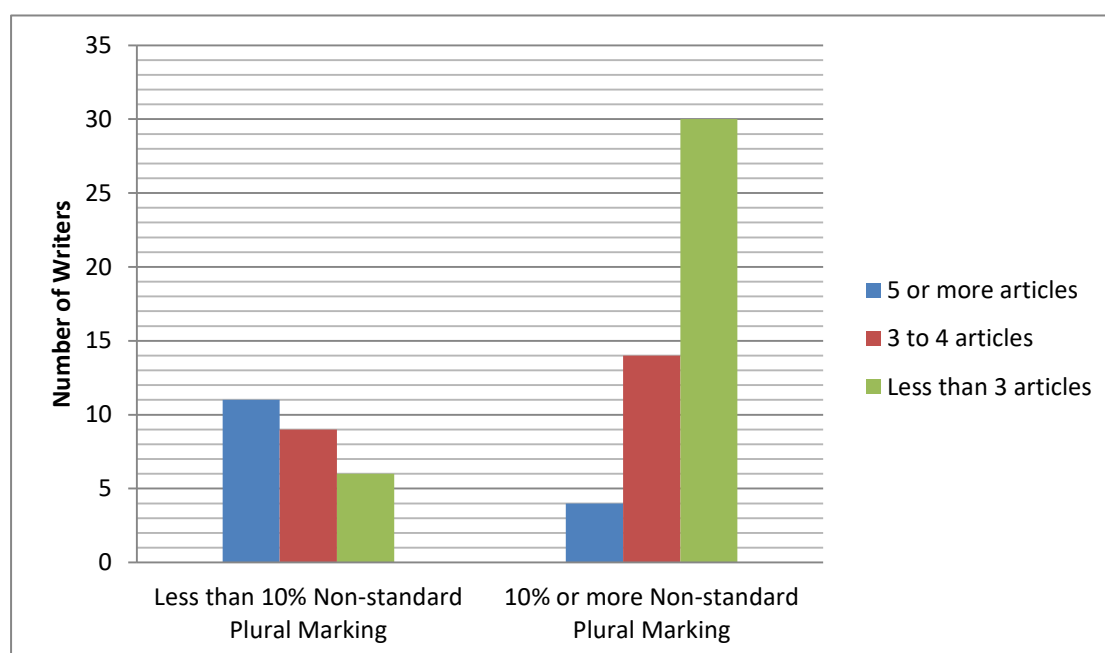


Graph 5.8: Numbers of High-variation Students Contributing Different Numbers of Articles

According to Graph 5.8, 39 (50.6%) out of these 77 high-variation writers have contributed more than three articles; 15 (19.5%) of these 77 writers have contributed more than 5 articles. In other words, slightly more than half of these high-variation

writers have contributed more than 2 articles. Recall sections 5.6.2.1 and 5.6.2.2 which mention that students who do not produce much or any non-standard plural marking are mostly those who contribute less than three articles. At first glance, it seems probable that in Hong Kong, students writing more essays are more likely to produce non-standard plural marking, probably because these students know that they are relatively less proficient in Standard English, and they believe that they need more writing practice in order to improve.

However, it does not answer the question of whether writing more can result in improvement, and in this case, acquisition of the standard rule of plural marking. Therefore, it is also worth investigating the relationship between the numbers of articles written and the percentage of the production of non-standard plural marking among the high-variation writers. The following graph displays the result.



Graph 5.9: Numbers of High-variation Writers Grouped According to Levels of

Contribution Producing Certain Percentage of Non-standard Plural Marking

On the left hand side of Graph 5.9, it is revealed that for those who produce less than 10% of non-standard plural marking, 42.3% of them (i.e. 11 out of 26) are high-level contributors, contributing more than 5 articles; 34.6% (i.e. 9 out of 26) of them belong to middle-level contributors with 3 to 4 articles; 23.1% (i.e. 6 out of 26) are low-level contributors, who have contributed less than 3 articles.

On the right hand side of the same graph, it can be seen that only 8.3% (4 out of 48) of those who produce 10% or more of non-standard plural marking are high-level contributors; 29.2% (i.e. 14 out of 48) of them are middle-level contributors; 62.5% (i.e. 30 out of 48) produce less than 3 articles.

In short, it can be seen that among the high-variation writers, many students who produce a higher percentage of non-standard plural marking are low-level contributors. On the other hand, many of those who produce less than 10% of non-standard plural marking are high-level contributors. Therefore, by writing more articles, these students probably see an improvement in correctly pluralizing the count nouns.

5.6.2.4 Relationship between Acquisition of Plural Marking and Acquisition of Other Native Rules

Recall Section 5.6.2.1 which mentions that it is not certain whether students who have acquired the native rule of plural marking have acquired other native rules of English grammar. This section will focus on the relationship between acquisition of

the native rule of plural marking and that of other native rules in English language among Hong Kong students. Given that time is limited for the current research, this section will only select 5 writers from each group (i.e. categorical, low-variation and high variation writers).

Among Selected Categorical Writers

Among the 5 selected categorical writers, 1 has been included in qualitative analysis in Part 4, and so 4 more writers are selected. These 4 authors are selected as they have the highest total numbers of plural tokens as shown in Appendix 3.4. From each of these 4 authors, one article is randomly selected and manually examined so that I can find out all the localized features in their articles.

Below is Table 5.3, showing the numbers of non-standard plural tokens and all non-standard tokens (i.e. all non-standard features of WLHKE which can be found in the selected articles) of these five authors.

Author	Article	Total Number of All Non-standard Tokens	Number of Non-standard Plural Tokens
winkiett	A1	15	1
Leekachun2001	A32	1	0
Tonylam	A200	19	2
kAiO0xD	A218	2	0

黃彬衝黃燈	A247	21	0
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Table 5.3: Performance of Selected Categorical Writers Based on the Numbers of
Non-standard Tokens

2 out of these 5 authors are highly proficient in English, producing few numbers of localized tokens. The other 3 each produce more than 10 non-standard forms in total, such as localized word collocation, omission of past participle and so forth. Two of the less proficient authors (i.e. winkiett and Tonylam) also produce non-standard plural marking; the non-standard plural tokens, however, do not belong to any lexical item investigated in this section.

Therefore, it can be claimed that: (1) acquisition of native rule of plural marking does not necessarily mean that the students have also acquired the other native rules in English grammar; and (2) since my current quantitative analysis does not cover all the lexical items and plural marking forms, some non-standard plural tokens can be found in categorical writers' essays. In other words, some of these categorical writers may not have completely acquired the native rule of plural marking.

Among Selected Low-variation Writers

All of the 5 selected low-variation writers have been included in Section 4, and results are summarized and listed in Table 5.4 below.

Author	Article	Total Number of All Non-standard Tokens	Number of Non-standard Plural Tokens
Cho90456934	A6	15	1
kelvinyhy	A7	22	4
h111222	A8	14	3
yannesying	A9	8	3
15935700	A10	32	1

Table 5.4: Performance of Selected :Low-variation Writers Based on the Numbers of Non-standard Tokens

As can be seen from Table 5.4, all except one author produce more than 10 non-standard tokens. Two of them produce more than 20 non-standard tokens. All of these selected low-variation writers produce non-standard plural marking, but the total numbers each of them produces are still fewer than 5.

Among Selected High-variation Writers

All of the 5 selected high-variation writers have been included in Section 4. The results are summarized and listed in Table 5.5 below.

Author	Article	Total Number of Non-standard Tokens	Number of Non-standard Plural Tokens
tfcvbnhg	A2	38	6
alexwong820	A3	33	7
Vincent0912	A4	32	2
Timsonkwok	A5	26	7
emily422	A11	48	12

Table 5.5: Performance of Selected High-variation Writers Based on the Numbers of
Non-standard Tokens

Table 5.5 shows that all of the selected high-variation writers produce more than 20 non-standard tokens in total. The numbers of total non-standard tokens are found to be higher among the high-variation writers than among the categorical writers.

When comparing the results of Tables 5.3 to 5.5, it can be assumed that although acquisition of plural marking does not guarantee acquisition of other native rules of English grammar, high variation of plural marking may be an indicator of production of other localized forms. In other words, acquisition of plural marking may be one of the earliest stages of Hong Kong students' language learning process; students are taught plural marking earlier than other grammatical rules of English language, and so students who fail to acquire plural marking have higher possibility to fail in acquiring other standard rules.

5.6.2.5 Summary

Section 5.6.2 discusses individual variation of production of non-standard plural marking. The contributors can be divided into categorical, low- and high-variation writers.

Categorical writers account for 31.3% of the 245 writers in my current analysis, and 35.1% of these categorical writers contribute more than 20 tokens. Among these writers, we can confidently claim that they have acquired rules of Standard English. As for the low-variation writers, 77.5% of them have contributed more than 20 tokens, and so it can also be claimed that these writers also acquired near-native rules of plural marking.

High-variation writers account for 32.5% of the total, and 77 of them have contributed more than 20 tokens, which allows us to observe variation among these individual writers. The rates of omission of plural marking range from 1% to 87%. A large proportion of the high-variation writers have contributed three or more articles, and further investigations reveal that many of them produce a higher percentage of non-standard plural marking than the average percentage of the overall case (i.e. when all writers are included, the percentage of omission of plural markers is 11.7%).

A second run of analysis with GoldVarb finds that high-variation writers alone produce 15.8% non-standard plural marking, which is roughly the same as the performance of the S5 students in Law's (2012) research. However, in view of a large number of these writers producing a higher percentage of non-standard plural marking, it is possible that many of these students are still trying to master standard plural

marking. It is also evident that among the high-variation writers, generally, the more articles a high-variation writer writes, the lower the percentage of non-standard forms he or she produces.

Lastly, Section 5.6.2.4 investigates the relationship between acquisition of native plural marking and that of other native rules of English grammar. It is found that students who have acquired the native rule of plural marking are not necessarily those who have also acquired the other standard rules. However, for those who fail to acquire the native rule of plural marking, they are very likely to produce more non-standard forms. Therefore, acquisition of plural marking may be an early stage of Hong Kong students' process of learning English language.

5.6.3 Lexical Items

5.6.3.1 Individual Lexical Items

Recall Section 5.5.1.1 which mentions that lexical items may have a significant effect on Hong Kong students' production of non-standard plural marking, as Poplack and Tagliamonte (1994) summarise that some classes of lexical items may condition speakers' production of different variants of plural marking. Although no previous study has been conducted to investigate this in the case of HKE, variation of plural marking in HKE may also be under the influence of lexical items.

As mentioned in Sections 5.6.2.1 and 5.6.2.2, categorical and low-variation writers do not display any or much variation, and so they may skew my data. In this section, data contributed by categorical and low-variation writers are removed. In other words, only high-variation writers are left in the current analysis, and the results

below show how high-variation writers produce non-standard forms when individual lexical items are considered.

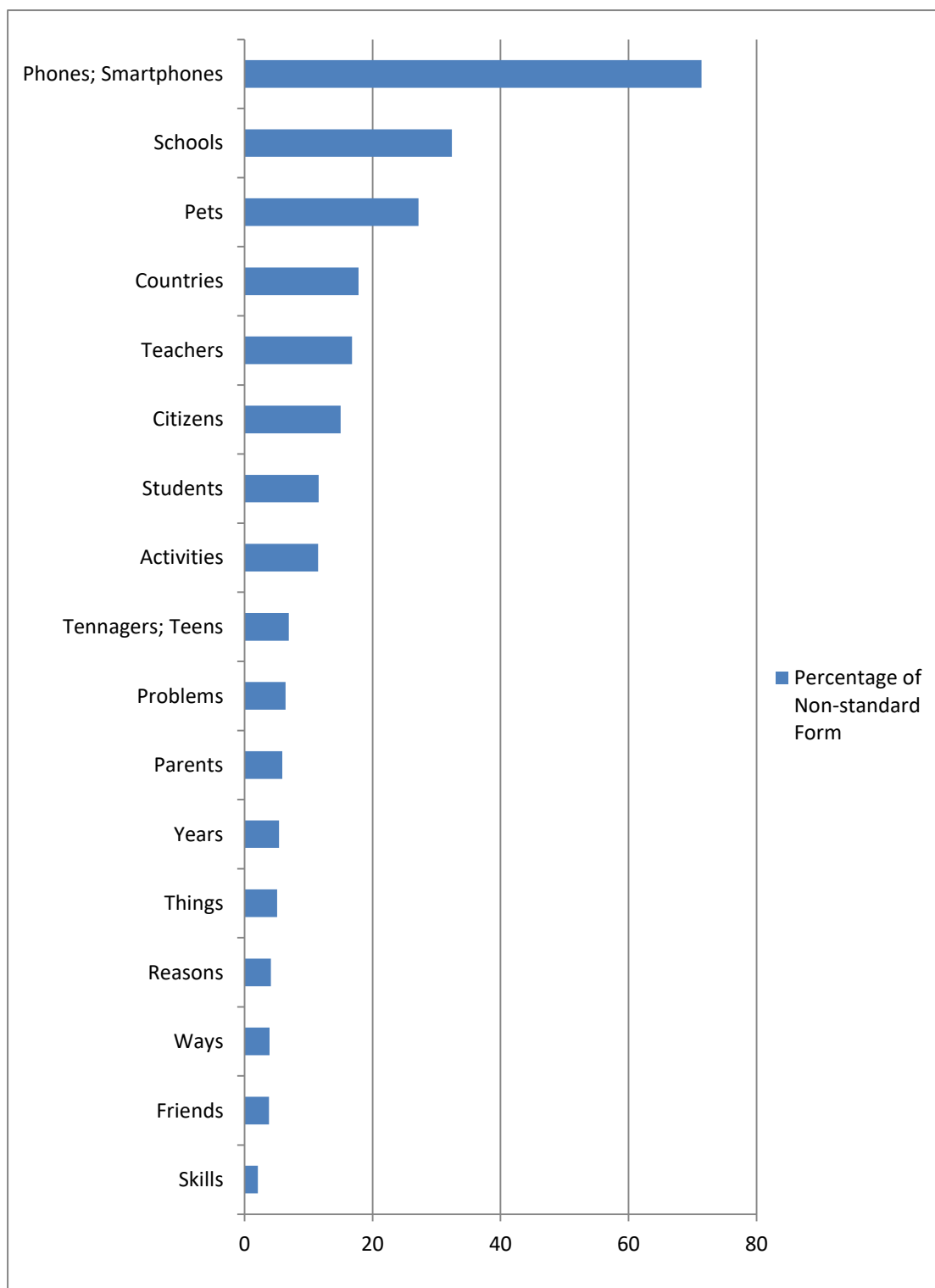
Below is Table 5.6, which lists the percentage of non-standard plural marking for the 17 selected individual lexical items, ranked in ascending order of the percentage.

Lexical Items	Number of Non-standard Forms	Total Number of Standard and Localized Forms	Percentage of Omission of Plural Marker (%)
Skills	2	95	2.1
Friends	5	133	3.8
Ways	2	51	3.9
Reasons	3	74	4.1
Things	4	79	5.1
Years	5	92	5.4
Parents	15	248	5.9
Problems	6	94	6.4
Teenagers; Teens	23	332	6.9
Activities	9	78	11.5

Students	113	970	11.6
Citizens	9	60	15.0
Teachers	33	196	16.8
Countries	13	73	17.8
Pets	25	92	27.2
Schools	112	346	32.4
Phones; Smartphones	45	63	71.4

Table 5.6: Percentage of Omission of Plural Marker for Individual Lexical Items
Among High-variation Writers

Below is the graphic representation of Table 5.6.



Graph 5.10: Percentage of Omission of Plural Marker for Individual Lexical Items
Among High-variation Writers

As shown in Table 5.6 and Graph 5.10, lexical items have influence on the use of plural marking, as a wide range of percentage of non-standard plural marking is demonstrated.

Only 4 items, namely *skills* (2.1%), *friends* (3.8%), *ways* (3.9%) and *reasons* (4.1%) have less than 5% non-standard plural marking, and so they are comparatively invulnerable to omission of plural marking.

3 lexical items, namely *phones/smartphones* (71.4%), *schools* (32.6%) and *pets* (27.2%), are found to have more than 20% non-standard plural marking.

5.6.3.2 Animacy of Nouns

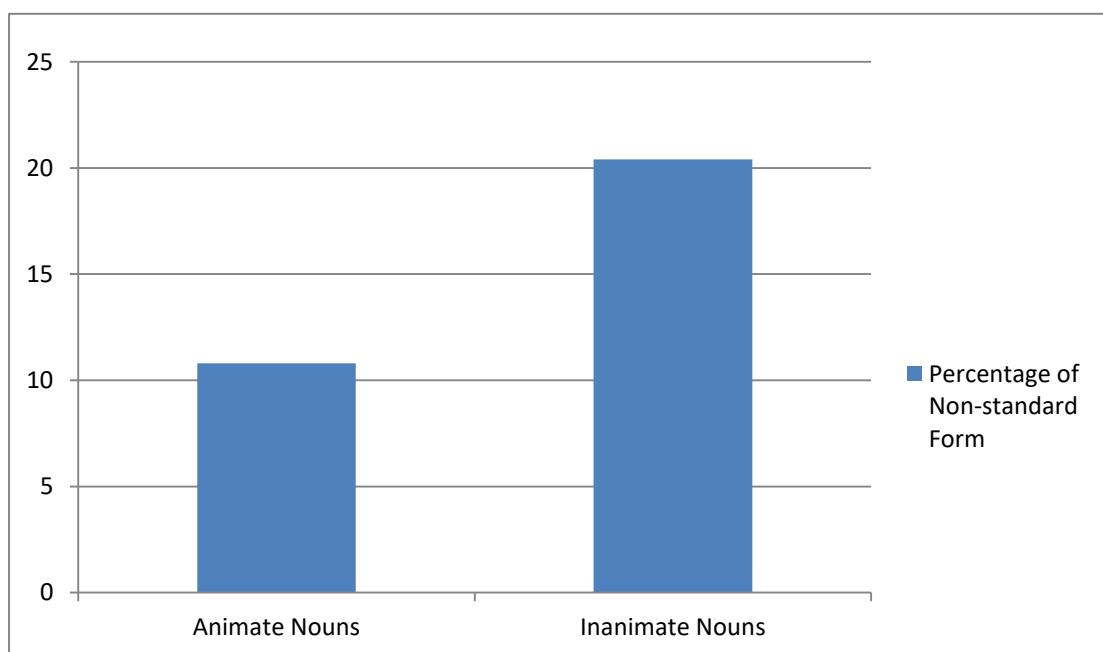
Recall Section 5.5.1.1 which mentions animacy of nouns is considered as one possible factor conditioning standard and non-standard plural marking in WLHKE. Young (1991) mentions that animacy of nouns is found to have an influence on the use of plural marking in TokPisin, which was studied by Mühlhäusler (1981) through its development from pidgin to creole. Young's research has also discovered that animacy favours standard plural marking among Chinese people with high English proficiency, whereas those with low English proficiency tend to omit plural markers for animate nouns. My current analysis will investigate whether the animacy of nouns has any significant effect on how Hong Kong students use plural marking.

Among the 77 high-variation writers, omission of plural marking according to the animacy of nouns is shown below.

Group	Number of Non-standard Forms	Total Number of Standard and Non-standard Forms	Percentage of Omission of Plurality (%)
Inanimate	427	2092	20.4
Animate	229	2120	10.8

Table 5.7: Percentage of Omission of Plural Markers according to Animate and Inanimate Groups Among High-variation Writers

Below is the graphic representation of Table 5.7.



Graph 5.11: Percentage of Omission of Plural Markers according to Animate and Inanimate Groups Among High-variation Writers

Table 5.7 reveals that omission of plural markers for inanimate nouns is 20.4%, which is almost twice as many as that for animate nouns (10.8%). This result again suggests that animate nouns are less vulnerable to omission of plural marking.

Young's (1991) research states that Chinese speakers with lower English proficiency disfavour standard plural marking in the presence of animate nouns. In my current analysis, the high-variation writers, who are considered relatively less proficient in English, still perform similarly to the Chinese speakers with high English proficiency in Young's research. It is possible that many, if not all, of the high-variation writers in my analysis have reached a certain level of English.

However, recall Section 5.6.3 which shows that the numbers of lexical items vary greatly. Therefore, it is possible that the high rates of omission of plural marking of some individual lexical items bring up the percentage of omission of plural marker for inanimate nouns. For example, the first two lexical items with the highest omission rate are *phones/smartphones* and *schools*, which are both inanimate nouns. These nouns may contribute to the higher overall percentage of non-standard plural marking in inanimate nouns as shown in Table 5.7. Moreover, the lexical items with the highest total numbers of tokens are students, schools, teenagers/teens and parents, three of which are animate nouns with a low percentage of omission (i.e. lower than 12%). These lexical items contribute to a lower overall rate of omission among the animate nouns.

Therefore, it is difficult to accurately evaluate how animacy of nouns may condition Hong Kong students' usage of standard and non-standard plural marking. In

other words, the question regarding how animacy of nouns constrains plural marking in WLHKE cannot yield any conclusive result.

5.6.4 Pre-modification

Recall Section 5.5.1.2 which mentions that previous studies (Budge 1989; Law, 2012; Setter et al., 2010: 46) have identified the presence/absence of pre-modifiers as a potential reminder to Hong Kong students; students are reported to be more aware of the necessity of attaching plural marker when count nouns are preceded by plurality-indicating pre-modifiers (Budge, 1989) than when pre-modifiers are absent (Law, 2012). This section will investigate any potential systematic variation of non-standard plural marking in Hong Kong students' formal English writing.

Recall Sections 5.6.2.1 and 5.6.2.2 which mention that categorical and low-variation writers do not produce many non-standard forms of plural marking, and so it is difficult for us to investigate how the Hong Kong students, who are relatively less proficient in English, produce non-standard plural marking. Therefore, in this section, only data of the high-variation writers are analysed.

Three classes of pre-modification are set up, and Table 5.18 below shows the results.

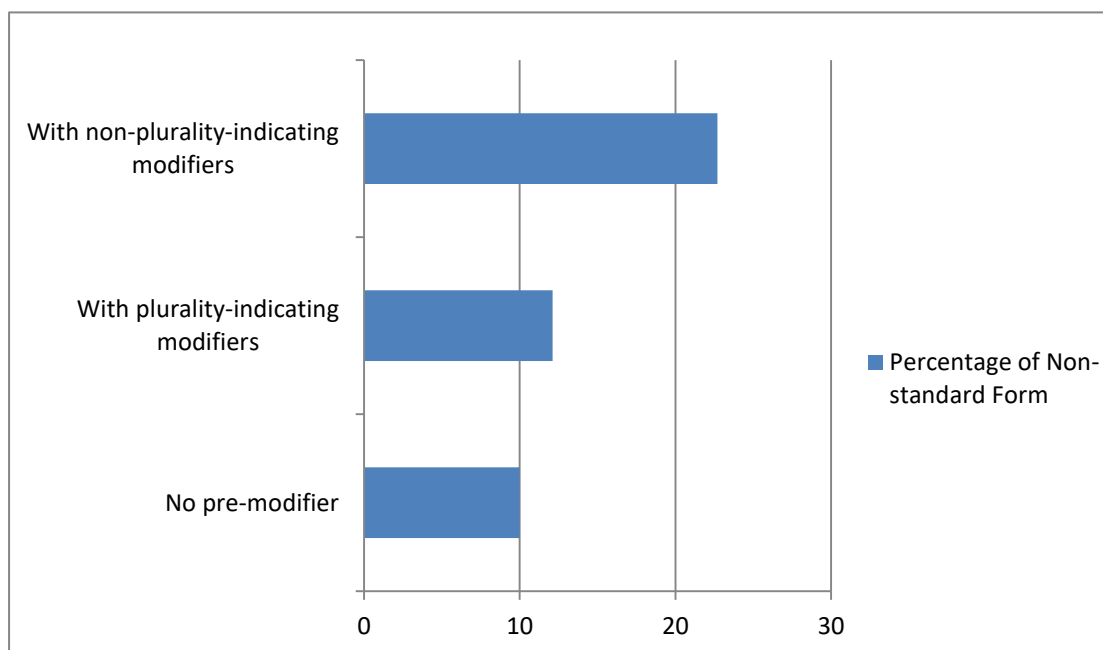
Nouns Preceded by Non-plurality-indicating Pre-modifiers	Nouns Preceded by Plurality-indicating Pre-modifiers	Nouns without Pre-modifier
--	--	-------------------------------

N	%	N	%	N	%
1735	22.7	780	12.1	1684	10

Table 5.8: Effect of the Presence of Pre-modifiers before Count Nouns among High-variation Writers

N: The number of tokens for each specific group according to types of pre-modification

Below is the graphic representation of Table 5.8.



Graph 5.12: Effect of the Presence of Pre-modifiers before Count Nouns among High-variation Writers

Table 5.8 reveals that among the high-variation writers, count nouns tend to lack plural marking when preceded by non-plurality-indicating modifiers (22.7%); when preceded by plurality-indicating modifiers, the percentage of omission of plural marker drops to 12.1%; similarly, count nouns without pre-modifier has the lowest percentage of non-standard plural marking (10.0%).

Again, the above results support the claims in the previous research (SHKE in Budge, 1989; WLHKE in Law, 2012), that Hong Kong students in general remind themselves of the necessity of attaching plural markers for count nouns without pre-modifier or those which are preceded by plurality-indicating pre-modifiers. Moreover, absence of a pre-modifier is the one condition which relatively favours standard plural marking more. Therefore, it is highly possible that among the students who are less proficient in English, using plural forms in generic reference is well learnt.

5.6.5 Multiple Influences of Lexical Items, Individual Preferences and Pre-modification

An in-depth investigation of my data reveals that the difference of rate of omission for each of the individual lexical items may be the result of individual contributors' preference and/or modification preceding those lexical items. In this section, I will look into the possibility of how the three independent variables may interact with one another, resulting in different rates of omission for lexical items.

6 lexical items are selected in the investigation in this section. 3 lexical items (*phones/smartphones*, *schools* and *pets*) with the highest rate of omission of

non-standard plural marking are chosen because their high omission rates allow us to investigate whether other linguistic constraints also give rise to the production of non-standard plural marking. The other 3 lexical items are those which exceed 200 for their total numbers, namely *students*, *parents* and *teenagers/teens*. The large number of total tokens for these 3 lexical items allows us to observe variation among contributors and types of pre-modification.

5.6.5.1 Individual Contributors and Lexical Items

Below are tables showing how individual contributors' preference and lexical items may combine and exert influences on plural marking in WLHKE. Note that only the data of high-variation writers are included.

Phones/Smartphones

The lexical items *phones/smartphones* are produced by 14 writers. Below is Table 5.9, showing the numbers of students for each degree of variation⁷.

Degree of Variation (Percentage of Non-standard Plural Marking)	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
0%	5	35.7

⁷Each writer's proportion of standard and non-standard forms for each of the selected lexical items can be found in Appendix 3.7.

1% - 10%	0	0.0
11% - 99%	1	7.1
100%	8	57.1

Table 5.9: Numbers of Students for Each Degree of Variation for Lexical Item

Phones/ Smartphones

The table above shows that the non-standard tokens are shared by 9 (64.3%) out of 14 writers. Moreover, all writers, except one, fall into the groups of producing 0% or 100% non-standard plural marking for the lexical item *phones/smartphones*; 8 (57.1%) out of 14 writers produce 100% non-standard forms for this lexical item, and 5 (35.7%) writers produce 100% standard forms. Only one author (7.1%) produces both standard and non-standard forms. Recall Section 5.6.2.3 which discovered that individual high-variation writers vary greatly in the production of non-standard plural marking, ranging from 1% to 87%. From the above table, individual variation is also observed, and so it is possible that it has an influence on the production of non-standard plural marking for the lexical item *phones/smartphones*.

However, note that 11 contributors have contributed fewer than 10 tokens for this lexical item, and so it is not certain whether the above data reveal the genuine pattern of variation of these contributors.

Schools

It is revealed that the tokens of the lexical item *schools* are produced by 50 writers. Below is Table 5.10, showing the numbers of students for each degree of variation.

Degree of Variation (Percentage of Non-standard Plural Marking)	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
0%	21	42.0
1% - 10%	2	4.0
11% - 99%	16	32.0
100%	11	22.0

Table 5.10: Numbers of Students for Each Degree of Variation for Lexical Item

Schools

As shown in Table 5.10, the non-standard tokens are shared by 29 (58.0%) of the 50 writers. 21 (42.0%) of the 50 writers do not produce any non-standard plural form for the lexical item *schools*, and 11 (22.0%) of these writers produce only non-standard plural forms for said lexical item. The rest of the writers (i.e. 18) show varying degrees of variation, with 16 (32.0%) of them producing 11% or more non-standard plural markings, and only 2 (4.0%) of them producing 1 to 10% non-standard forms. Similar to the case of lexical item *phones/smartphones*, individual variation can be observed for the lexical item *schools*, and so it is possible

that individual variation has an influence on Hong Kong students' production of non-standard plural marking for this lexical item as well. However, note that for many contributors, their number of tokens for this lexical item is fewer than 10, and so the pattern of variation may not be entirely accurate.

Pets

It is revealed that the tokens of the lexical items *pets* are produced by 7 writers. Below is Table 5.11, showing the results.

Degree of Variation (Percentage of Non-standard Plural Marking)	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
0%	2	28.6
1% - 10%	1	14.3
11% - 99%	4	57.1
100%	0	0.0

Table 5.11: Numbers of Students for Each Degree of Variation for Lexical Item *Pets*

Overall, the non-standard tokens are shared by 5 (71.4%) of the 7 writers. 2 (28.6%) of 7 writers do not produce any non-standard plural marking; 1 (14.3%) produces 1 to 10% non-standard forms; 4 (57.1%) produce more than 10%

non-standard plural marking. No author produces 100% non-standard plural form, which is different from the cases for *phones/smartphones* and *schools*.

Individual variation is found to have influence on Hong Kong students' production of non-standard plural marking for the lexical item *pets*. However, note that the number of tokens for some of the contributors is small, and so the pattern of variation may not be representative of these contributors.

Teenagers/teens

Lexical item *teenagers/teens* has 332 tokens, which are shared by 41 contributors in my current research.

Degree of Variation (Percentage of Non-standard Plural Marking)	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
0%	26	63.4
1% - 10%	2	4.9
11% - 99%	8	19.5
100%	5	12.2

Table 5.12: Numbers of Students for Each Degree of Variation for Lexical Item

Teenagers/teens

The non-standard tokens are shared by 15 (36.6%) of the 41 writers. 5 (12.2%) of these authors produce 100% non-standard plural marking for this lexical item; 8 (19.5%) produce 10 to 99% non-standard plural forms; 2 (4.9%) of them produce 1 to 10% non-standard plural marking. The rest (63.4%) of the authors do not produce any non-standard form.

Note that many of the contributors have fewer than 10 tokens for this lexical item, and so the pattern of variation as shown in the above table may not be accurate. Nonetheless, it has been established that individual performance has an influence on Hong Kong students' production of non-standard plural marking for lexical item *teenagers/teens*.

Students

The 970 tokens of lexical item *students* are shared by 70 contributors in my current research. Below is Table 5.13 showing the results of individual performance for this lexical item.

Degree of Variation (Percentage of Non-standard Plural Marking)	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
0%	31	44.3
1% - 10%	10	14.3

11% - 99%	27	38.6
100%	2	2.9

Table 5.13: Numbers of Students for Each Degree of Variation for Lexical Item

Students

According to Table 5.13, non-standard forms are shared by 39 (55.7%) of the 70 contributors. 2 authors (2.9%) produce 100% non-standard plural marking; 27 (38.6%) authors produce 11 to 99% non-standard plural marking; 10 (14.3%) produce 1 to 10% non-standard form for this lexical item. 31 contributors (44.3%) produce only standard plural marking.

Again, the numbers of tokens for many contributors are fewer than 10, and so the pattern of variation may not be accurate. Nevertheless, the results in Table 5.13 show that individual performance influences production of standard and non-standard plural marking among the Hong Kong students.

Parents

Lexical item *parents* has 248 tokens, which are shared by 48 contributors. Below is Table 5.14 showing the individual performance for this lexical item.

Degree of Variation	Number of	Percentage
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(Percentage of Non-standard Plural Marking)	Students	(%)
0%	40	83.3
1% - 10%	1	2.1
11% - 99%	6	12.5
100%	1	2.1

Table 5.14: Numbers of Students for Each Degree of Variation for Lexical Item

Parents

Table 5.14 shows that the non-standard tokens of lexical item *parents* are shared by 8 (16.7%) of the 48 contributors. The vast majority (83.3%) of the contributors do not produce any non-standard form; only 1 (2.1%) author produces 1 to 10% non-standard plural marking; another one (2.1%) produces 100% non-standard plural marking; 6 (12.5%) authors produce 10 to 99% non-standard plural marking. Again, note that for many contributors, their number of tokens for this lexical item is small, and so the pattern of variation may not be accurate.

In sum(mary), individual performance for the selected lexical items varies. In other words, both individual variation and specific lexical items have a combined effect on the omission of plural marking in WLHKE.

5.6.5.2 Pre-modification and Lexical Items

Pre-modification is also considered a factor which may condition Hong Kong students' production of non-standard plural marking. As shown in Table 5.8 in Section 5.6.4 above, presence of a non-plurality-indicating pre-modifier favours non-standard plural marking, while absence of a pre-modifier favours standard plural marking. In this part, I will also investigate how students use pre-modifiers with the 6 selected lexical items. Below is Table 5.15 which shows the results.

		Non-plurality-indicating Pre-modification		Plurality-indicating Pre-modification		Zero Pre-modification	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Lexical Items	Phones/ Smartphones	37	78.4	0	0	25	60.0
	Schools	243	32.9	42	16.7	61	41.0
	Pets	61	37.7	5	0.0	25	4.0
	Teenagers/teens	78	24.4	26	3.8	263	6.8
	Students	176	38.6	122	4.1	761	7.5
	Parents	129	12.4	28	7.1	98	0

Table 5.15: Percentage of Non-standard Form According to Pre-Modification for 6
Selected Lexical Items

For all the 6 lexical items selected, zero pre-modification has the lowest percentage of non-standard plural marking for all the lexical items, except *schools*. Presence of plurality-indicating pre-modification also has lower percentage of non-standard plural marking. These results are in line with the overall results regarding the overall picture of how pre-modification influences variation of plural marking of WLHKE. Moreover, the results in Table 5.15 also demonstrate that pre-modification and individual lexical items may have a combined effect on variation of plural marking of WLHKE.

5.6.5.3 Summary

Individual lexical items show remarkable variation of standard and non-standard plural marking, with three lexical items, namely *phones/smartphones*, *schools* and *pets* apparently favouring non-standard form. Among these 3 lexical items, *phones/smartphones* is the one with an exceptionally high rate of omission of plural marking (71.4%), probably because this lexical item entered English relatively lately, and Hong Kong students may also meet it in singular form. Therefore, they may not know whether *smartphone* is countable or not.

When investigating in detail the 6 lexical items - 3 of them with the highest rate of omission of plural marking, and another 3 of them with over 200 tokens - it is found that individual variation and pre-modification may have a combined influence with individual lexical items. In other words, it is possible that multiple factors have an influence on Hong Kong students' production of non-standard plural marking.

5.7 Limitations

Exclusion of Non-linguistic Factors

My current analysis puts emphasis on linguistic constraints when investigating Hong Kong students' production of plural marking, but other possible non-linguistic factors may also have influences on how the learners produce standard and non-standard forms.

Personality and sociopsychological factors include motivation and attitudes, intelligence and aptitude. Dewaele (2004) has found that learner anxiety, risk-taking and degree of extroversion can affect learners' performance. For example, when under stress, people who are extroverts tend to speak fluently in oral communication, whereas the introverts tend to be more self-monitoring. Students in my current research are preparing for the public examination, and it is believed that some of them may also be writing under stress. However, their personality is not known, and it is also impossible to investigate any other sociopsychological factors which the students encounter.

Apart from the personality of contributors, characteristics and status of the variants may also influence learners' production of variants. 'Characteristics of the variants' refers to the "relative ease or difficulty surrounding their realization" (Howard, Mougeon and Dewaele, 2013), which can be reflected by the structural complexity of the variants. A variant with a more complex structure is more likely to result in learning difficulties, and thus is more likely to give rise to the production of non-standard variants.

The status of the variants can be reflected by the relative frequencies of the

variants in the spoken texts of speakers. Some variants are established earlier and considered more advanced, while others are relatively new and considered less advanced. According to Regan et al. (2009), who explore uses of French negation among native speakers and Irish university learners, the native speakers tend to use relatively less advanced variants, while L2 learners tend to use the long-established variants. Moreover, they also discover that the Irish learners are able to perceive the variants being used in different frequencies in native speakers' speech, and some of these learners will use, to some degree, the variants according to the frequencies they perceive.

Therefore, it can be said that linguistic factors may not be the only condition which influences learners' production of standard and non-standard variants. Due to the limited time and resource, the current research concentrates only on the linguistic constraints. Future research can focus on the non-linguistic factors which may govern Hong Kong students' production of WLHKE.

Unknown Background Information of Contributors

The contributors are netizens who do not need to provide any personal information when registering in the/an LS forum and when posting essays in this forum. Therefore, the educational backgrounds of these contributors remain unknown. Without these backgrounds, I am unable to identify related variables, and so I cannot classify the students into different groups accordingly. For example, in terms of English, students coming from English-as-Medium-of-Instruction schools in general perform better than those coming from Chinese-as-Medium-of-Instruction schools (Shek-Chun, 2015). This phenomenon cannot be empirically tested in my current

study, as I cannot collect any educational background from the contributors.

Therefore, future research can collect certain backgrounds from contributors when investigating Hong Kong students' production of WLHKE.

6 Discussion

The current research aims to list the distinctive grammatical features of WLHKE (Section 4) and demonstrate its variation regarding plural marking (Section 5). In this section, I will discuss the findings in both Sections 4 and 5.

6.1 Description of Grammatical Features of WLHKE

The main research question is: How similar is WLHKE to other kinds of HKE, CHKE and SHKE?

To answer this question, one must look into the details of WLHKE itself (see Table 4.2) and then make comparisons with the others (see Table 4.3). As shown in Section 4.3, WLHKE contains features which are mostly involved at the morphological and lexical levels; localized features at the syntactic level are also found, but features on this level seem to be less frequently produced, as can be seen in Table 4.2.

From the same table, one can also find that a number of localized features of WLHKE are likely to be the outcome of L1 interference, which confirms some previous studies (Beer, 2010; Budge, 1989; Chan, 1987; Chan, 2003; Chu, 1987; Chu, 2005; Kwan, 1997) conducted in the EA framework. Since Chinese, unlike English, is not inflectional, does not have similar rules of inflections as English does, some Hong Kong students may have difficulty in mastering the native rule of English morphologies. Some may also fail to acquire sufficient knowledge of word collocations in English, and so they may use localized forms as a replacement.

Differences in sentence patterns in Chinese and English may also contribute to the emergence of distinctive sentence patterns of WLHKE.

When comparing WLHKE with SHKE and CHKE, the current research is not able to conclude the degree of their similarity satisfactorily. As shown in Table 4.3, WLHKE shares features with the other two varieties of HKE; simultaneously, it has been established that SHKE and CHKE consist of features which are absent in WLHKE. However, due to the small size of data available, thorough comparison is impossible.

Nonetheless, taking quantity into account, Paskewitz's (1991) research states that oral errors (SHKE) are more common than written errors (WLHKE). Poon (2010) also mentions that some features of CHKE are exclusive to CHKE (i.e. absent in WLHKE). However, a comprehensive comparison is required to further support this argument. For this purpose, the variationist paradigm will serve as a useful tool.

6.2 A Case Study of Plural Marking in WLHKE

Apart from listing the linguistic features of WLHKE, as done in Section 4, the variationist paradigm (in Section 5) can provide a more in-depth picture of how each feature is produced, because it allows us to take different types of linguistic components into consideration. In other words, by adopting the variationist paradigm, we can find out how linguistic components give rise to the production of (non-)standard plural marking in WLHKE.

To the best of my knowledge, no previous study has yet investigated the variation of SHKE or that of CHKE. Nevertheless, Young's (1991) research results,

based on spoken data from Chinese subjects in America, can serve as a reference of what variation may be like in SHKE. As for CHKE, no such reference can be drawn, and so comparison between WLHKE and CHKE cannot be done.

Compared with Young's (1991) research, my current thesis finds that WLHKE contains a higher proportion of standard plural marking than the spoken form does (88.3% vs 65.0%). Assuming that the variation pattern of plural marking in SHKE resembles the result in Young's study, WLHKE is more similar to Standard English than SHKE is in this respect.

The result of my study of Hong Kong people's tendency to omit the plural marker is in line with Law's study (2012), which shows that S5 and S1 students, when writing in English, correctly pluralize 84.3% and 82.2% of the count nouns respectively. My study, based on around 500 articles, has found that 88.3% of the collected data have been pluralized in correct way, which largely confirms the results in Law's study.

The following sections will discuss more of the findings of my research.

6.2.1 Multiple Causes of Hong Kong Students' Production of Standard and Non-standard Plural Marking

Bayley (2007) states that multiple causes lead to learners' production of different linguistic variants. My research confirms Bayley's statement as it finds that performance of individual contributors, individual lexical items and pre-modification have a combined effect on Hong Kong students' production of standard and non-standard plural marking in WLHKE.

Moreover, my research is able to test empirically the claims of previous studies. Pre-modifiers, according to previous studies, play a significant role in Hong Kong students' usage of the plural marker, which can be applied to both WLHKE and SHKE. Budge (1989) mentions in her research that the presence of plurality-indicating pre-modifiers exerts influence on Hong Kong students' production of standard plural forms in SHKE. In WLHKE, the absence and presence of modifiers, as Law's study (2012) shows, are one significant factor governing Hong Kong students' acquisition of plurality. However, Budge and Law have not studied to what extent the presence and absence of pre-modifiers influences Hong Kong students' production of (non-)standard plural markers. While the number of tokens is small in Budge's study, Law does not elaborate on this issue either, admitting that further classification of pre-modifiers is required for future investigation.

My research finds that in WLHKE, the absence of a pre-modifier favours standard forms more than the presence of pre-modifiers does. Plurality-indication of pre-modifiers also promotes the standard forms. Overall, my research confirms Budge's findings that pre-modifiers indicating plurality do remind students of the needs to attach –s suffix to plural count nouns. It also confirms Law's finding that senior students tend to pluralize plural count nouns which are not preceded by any pre-modifier. And yet it should be noted that variation of plural marking in WLHKE is likely to be caused by multiple factors, as my research finds that individual lexical items and the individual contributors are also factors which influence variation.

My research findings, when applied to education, can bring several suggestions to both students and teachers in Hong Kong. Teachers can encourage students to adopt the strategy of locating plurality-indicating pre-modifiers. This strategy may be especially important to less proficient students. Teachers should also remind students

that bare count nouns must have an attached plural marker when students want to make generic reference.

6.2.2 Comparison of Omission of Plural Marker in Written and Spoken Texts

Compared with SHKE, Hong Kong people produce much fewer non-standard variants in WLHKE. In his investigation of omission of plural markers produced in Chinese people's speech, Young (1991) finds that 65% of the collected tokens omit plural markers, which is more than 20% lower than the findings in my current research. The findings from Young's and my research confirm that written texts tend to be asynchronous, while the spoken texts tend to be synchronous. In other words, written texts with formal settings are more often monitored, resulting in relatively fewer occurrences of non-standard forms, whereas spoken texts are less monitored during production, (so that) hence/thus they contain more non-standard forms. Therefore, it is probable that WLHKE is more similar to Standard English than SHKE is.

Hong Kong students' formal English writing appears to be heavily monitored, probably because of linguistic prescription.

First of all, formal English writing requires Standard English. HKE is still generally regarded as incorrect English, and so its linguistic features will be considered inappropriate in formal English writing.

Motivation also drives Hong Kong students to comply with the rules of Standard English. As mentioned, the ability to use Standard English is believed to be one factor

which helps people achieve a successful career path in Hong Kong. This means that learning Standard English is an important focus for Hong Kong Chinese from a young age. (Braine and McNaught, 2007).

Lastly, some Hong Kong students are also taught to proof-read their written texts after they finish writing. Proof-reading allows students to look for errors and make corrections, which is difficult to do so when producing spoken texts.

6.2.3 Implications for the status of Hong Kong English

As mentioned in Section 2.4.2.1, scholars (e.g. Groves, 2009, 2010; Poon, 2005, 2010) argue that a variety of nativised English is not merely one with distinctive linguistic features, but also the speakers' attitudes towards the varieties. This research concentrates on the linguistic features of WLHKE, which alone cannot build up a convincing claim that WLHKE is a variety of HKE. However, my research identifies the omission of plural markers as a linguistic feature whose production is systematic to a certain extent. Further investigation is required for studying the other linguistic features through a quantitative method. Investigation into the writers' attitudes towards WLHKE is also required if evaluation of WLHKE is to be done.

7. Conclusion

In this study we have discovered a large number of localized features of WLHKE, which is a potential variety of HKE used in the formal settings of education and the workplace. Some features of WLHKE may arise from L1 interference and overgeneralization. Hong Kong students, learning English as their second language, inevitably make mistakes, and when they find it difficult to master certain rules of Standard English, they may then rely on the strategies of L1 interference (i.e. using the linguistic system of Cantonese on the target language) and overgeneralization (over-applying rules of Standard English which they have acquired).

When compared with other varieties of HKE (e.g. SHKE and CHKE), WLHKE seems to contain fewer types of distinctive features. This may reflect the fact that Hong Kong people are under the influence of linguistic prescription, and so in formal contexts, they tend to produce English texts similar to Standard English. WLHKE, therefore, is more likely to be monitored, and it is also more conservative than SHKE and CHKE.

Moreover, I have also carried out an investigation of plural marking in WLHKE by adopting a variationist perspective. From this investigation, we learn that linguistic variation also exists in WLHKE, and Hong Kong students' usages of standard and non-standard plural marking are probably conditioned by multiple factors, such as individual preferences, individual lexical items and pre-modification.

It has also been established that plural marking in WLHKE tends to be conservative, with 88.3% of the tokens being written in the standard form. When compared with Spoken English (i.e. 65% conforming to standard plural marking;

Young, 1991) among Chinese people, WLHKE has a lower percentage of non-standard plural marking.

Little previous research on HKE has been conducted from a variationist perspective, and so it is still impossible to accurately compare the percentages of standard and non-standard forms among different varieties of HKE. Future research can use a variationist paradigm to explore how Hong Kong people produce standard and localized features when using HKE in different domains.

The case study of plural marking in WLHKE is carried out in a quantitative approach, which can also contribute to the field of SLA, because this approach sheds light on how Hong Kong students use standard and non-standard plural marking. Teachers can now understand how individual preferences, lexical items and pre-modification may condition students' usages of standard and non-standard plural marking, therefore they can think of new strategies for students. Future research can also use the variationist paradigm to test language transfer in Hong Kong students' English learning, and further investigate the multiple factors which condition Hong Kong students' production of localized features and their corresponding standard forms.

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